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VOL. 178.

THE COMET OF A SEASON

BY

JUSTIN MCCARTHY, M. P.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

HAMBURG.

KARL GRÄDENER & J. F. RICHTER.

1882.

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Vol. 178.

THE COMET OF A SEASON.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

ANNUAL REPORT

OF

THE BOARD OF

1872

THE COMET OF A SEASON

IN THE YEAR

1872

THE COMET OF A SEASON

BY

JUSTIN MCCARTHY, M. P.,

AUTHOR OF

"HISTORY OF OUR OWN TIMES," "LADY DISDAIN," "MISS-
MISANTHROPE" &c.

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THE COMET OF A SEASON.

CHAPTER I.

"LOWLINESS IS YOUNG AMBITION'S LADDER."

THE teller of this story has a strong objection to the mysterious in fiction. He is quite willing that the personages in the tale should get involved in bewilderment and confusion as often as occasion requires. But he holds to it that the reader ought to have a clear understanding all the time of the real meaning and explanation of everything that seems a mystery. Some of the plays of an otherwise not very meritorious dramatist, the elder Crébillon, always seem to him in one part of their arrangement to furnish a pattern to the composers of all fiction, whether in the form of the drama or in that of the romance. Crébillon filled certain of his plays with puzzles. Nobody came out

in the end to be the person he seemed to be. Either he was passing off for somebody not himself, or he honestly believed himself to be somebody that he was not. Torturing complications thereby arose; but only for the people in the play. There was no torture for the audience. Crébillon, by one simple and bold device, saved them all pangs of conjecture and torment of doubt. The list of "personages of the drama" prefixed to each play carefully explained the identity of every character. Something of this kind was set out—"Alceste, a young man believed to be the son of the peasant Pierre, but in reality the son of the Count de l'Espée. Bianca, supposed to be a gipsy girl, but afterwards discovered to be the long-lost daughter of the Marquise de Monteville." Thus the audience were let comfortably into the secret at the beginning, and never had to turn mentally back and hastily revise their first impression about any of the personages. I have long since forgotten all about Crébillon's plays, except this arrangement of his *dramatis personæ*; but that has always appeared to me charmingly inartificial, straightforward, and deserving of the gratitude of men. In the story I am now about to tell, I shall, after my own different fashion, bear this principle in mind. Any little mystery that is in it shall be only for the persons who move in the drama, and not for the readers.

I would therefore ask those readers to turn

back with me for a few pages to a period before that at which the connected action of the story begins. One glimpse at a quiet scene which passed some fifteen or sixteen years earlier than that day will be enough to put the reader in full possession of much that was a secret to men and women of whom the story is told, and which if known by them in time, might have influenced so significantly their actions and their lives as to leave no story worth the telling. Yet even that scene, if it could have been looked on by some of the persons in the story, would not have made things as clear to them as a few slight hints of explanation shall make them to the reader. To learn that a man is not really what he professes to be, might, after all, give a very imperfect and misleading idea of the man's full character. It might lead to a stern, uncompromising verdict, instead of a recommendation to mercy.

On a soft evening of late summer, a young man and a young woman sat on a bench in a small public park just outside one of the great northern towns of England. They were apparently watching the setting of the sun. The sight was beautiful enough to have won the attention of any two young people, if we still cling to the fond idea that young men and women do really care much more for nature and her charms than the seniors with whom the world has been too much, and whose sun therefore may be supposed to have

suffered eclipse. But this young man and woman were not really absorbed by the glory of the sunset. *He* was gazing at the west, to be sure; but his eyes did not seem to follow the descent of the sun. *She* was not now looking at the sun; she was looking at him. Her eyes were fixed on him with a wistful, devoted, uneasy look, like that which a French painter has given to the eyes of Sappho as she watches the countenance of her lover, and his unsatisfied gaze far into immeasurable deeps of thought; immeasurable, that is to say, for her, or at least not measured by her. Any one could see that this young pair were a pair—were married. No sister leans so on a brother and looks into his face with a look like that, love she him never so tenderly. Nor, it is to be feared, does a young lover ever look so fixedly and so far away from the eyes of the girl he loves and has not yet been able to call his wife. These lovers were married; had been married rather more than a year.

The young woman was pretty, winsome, anxious-looking; she was clearly what would be called in the common acceptation of the word a "lady." The young man was strikingly handsome; tall, slender, dark, and dreamy-looking. Even a man looking at the two would have admitted that the pretty pale girl was practically extinguished by the remarkable appearance of her young husband. Perhaps a not too keen observer might

also have come to the conclusion that this handsome young man was not so distinctly a "gentleman," again employing a word in its conventional sense, as the girl was a lady. For all the well-dressed and graceful appearance of the youth, it still had something of what we cannot perhaps describe better than as the "glorified artisan" air. The powers of witchcraft would not have been needed to enable any one with his wits about him to reach the quick conclusion that the young wife had somewhat descended from her social position to get to the young lover, and that she adored him all the more.

"The sun is going down," the girl said. "Look, love! he will be gone in a moment."

"Yes," the young man answered, without turning to her. "I didn't notice; I wasn't watching him."

"I thought you were absorbed in the sunset; I wouldn't have said a word to disturb you until he did sink. You ought to have been absorbed in *me*, and not in the sun; but I wasn't jealous; I quite forgive you."

"But you see I wasn't thinking about the sun," he said, with a smile, and turning to her for the first time. She almost blushed when his deep eyes rested on hers, and she saw that, for all his inattentive ways, there was genuine affection in them. "I was thinking of you—all the time; all the time."

"Oh, come now, that I know is a story. I am sure you were not."

"Why do you think that?"

"Well, for one thing, because you never looked at me or turned your eyes to mine all the time. No, no; you were thinking of something else. No matter; it was something great and good, I am sure; and I wouldn't have you wasting your intellect always in thinking of a little ridiculous woman, even though she is your wife. So you may confess openly."

"Well," he said slowly, "it is true all the same. I was thinking of you; I was thinking of both of us—of you and me together."

She gave a little shudder of pleasure, if such a word may be used, and clung closer to him in a nestling sort of way. The public park was very lonely now, at least in that part of it, away from the main thoroughfare and great open walks, and the young wife might nestle as closely as she pleased unseen of critical eyes. Even the sun was no longer there to look at her.

"Yes, I was thinking of us both. I was thinking of our prospects, and our future."

"Oh! that!" she said. She was not so glad-some as she had been an instant before. "You are anxious and uneasy; I know your mind is troubled; you are not happy."

He said, "I want a career."

"A career already!"

"Already? Why, I am three-and-twenty! and men have made themselves a name, before that, already."

"I didn't mean in that way," she said. What she had meant was clear enough. She meant, "We have already been married little more than a year, and are you already discontented with anything?" If she had been in better spirits she would have asked him, "Have you not me? Am not I enough?" But she was not in good spirits; something seemed to oppress her; she was silent for the most part, and occasionally inclined to be tearful, for no reason that she could well have explained. Nothing was said for a moment or two, and then she began:—

"But you have good prospects, and we are very happy; why should we want anything more—now, at least?"

"It won't always be *now*," he replied a little impatiently; "and you don't know, you couldn't know, how impatient it makes one when he thinks he is capable of doing something and can't see his way to doing anything. Look here, love; there are times when I begin to think I shall never come to anything! I get it into my head that I have nothing in me—nothing, nothing, nothing at all. Then I feel as if I should like to kill myself. Yes, I do indeed. I am not talking nonsense."

"Then you couldn't be happy, even with *me*,

if you did not have a successful career and show what you could do?"

"No!" he said desperately, "I couldn't be happy; it is no use trying to get over that. I couldn't be happy."

"You don't really care about me; not as I care about you. I could be happy for ever with you—anywhere, anyhow."

"It is because I do love you that I couldn't be happy without showing that I was worth the love of a woman like you. You could be happy with me anywhere? Yes! but there is all the difference. You have given up everything for me—your people and all; I have given up nothing; I had nothing to give up. I want to show that I am worth something, and that you were not quite mistaken in throwing yourself away on me. That is why I feel so wild sometimes. What if things go on to the end just like this—"

"Oh, if they only would!" she said.

"Yes, yes, in that way it would be happiness, of course, of course; but I mean if they go on to the end without my doing anything to make a name, and your people see that you have married only a commonplace creature, the son of a man who keeps a livery-stable—and himself an office clerk! rather than that, darling—I hope you will be crying over my grave."

"For shame! I don't believe you love me at all. You are only thinking of yourself, not of

me. What do I care whether you make a name or not, or people admire you or not? I married you because I loved you—yourself, and not what any one else—the world or whatever it is—might have seen in you. I saw my happiness in you, I thought. That was enough for me.”

“Don’t be angry, darling,” he said soothingly; for he was very fond of her. “Things will come all right. I’ll make myself something of a name. You shan’t be always talked of as the office clerk’s wife; the livery-stable keeper’s daughter-in-law. I’ll make a name. I’ll be known in the world; you shall be proud of me yet!”

She was chilled and hurt.

“It is not well to set one’s heart on such things,” she said. “‘Fame flies the pursuer and pursues the flier,’ I used to read somewhere; I think it was in some school exercise. One may go up like a rocket.”

“And come down like the stick,” he said, smiling contentedly. “Very well; I should like even that better than nothing. The rocket does go up, don’t you see, and flames and sparkles, and people stop to look at it. What if it does come down? Everything comes down sooner or later. I’d rather be the rocket than the gas-jet in the office that people turn on when they like and off when they like, and never say anything about. Besides,” he added more gravely, “I shall not be the rocket. I don’t want to shine for a moment

or two without any purpose. I want to be known as one who did great things for his fellow-man and the world; and I shall be known in that way some day, I don't want only to explode merely; I want to blaze."

"Wasn't there," she said, "one who blazed the comet of a season?"

"I don't know—I haven't read much poetry. But I should rather be the comet of a season than not blaze at all."

Then throwing himself back on the bench and clasping his hands behind his head with the manner of one who has settled a question, the young man sat in silence a moment. The girl was silent, too; she looked up at the pale sky in which some faint specks of light were already seen. The young wife's heart was sinking within her. She was egotistic, like all loving women, and she had been under the impression that her love would be career enough for her husband. He, too, was egotistic, but in a different way.

He had repeated with literal correctness the facts of his birth and his bringing up. He was now a clerk in an office. At the time when he was first put into that position he felt as if his heart was swelling with pride. To be in an office near the Exchange; to be in a great dark room, with desks, and clerks, and messengers, with gas burning all day long in the winter months; to be spoken of as one of the young men from Aqu-

taine and Company's office, seemed to him to open a glorious career for young ambition. For his father was a livery-stable keeper, and it was by the favour and kindness of a patron whose carriages the father took care of that the youth was lifted from his lowly situation at an age much more mature than that at which boys usually begin to learn business in such a town, and set with his foot on the first round of commerce's ladder to fortune. The town in which he lived was one where colossal fortunes are made in a few days, and truly are often lost again as quickly, and then sometimes remade; where the unknown adventurer of last year is the great luxurious ostentatious merchant prince of to-day. What might not genius and courage do in such a place?

Meanwhile, however, the young man had only his foot on the first round of the ladder. For some time his actual duties were hardly more dignified than those of a messenger. He did not find that he was developing much genius for mounting quickly. He seemed to be very far away indeed from the notice not merely of any of the principals, but even of the superior clerks. While he was still with his father, looking after or trying to look after the livery stables, the father had been in the habit of giving lessons in riding to young ladies and gentlemen, and sometimes the son in his absence had taken his place. He gave lessons in a riding-ground specially laid out for

the purpose, and he took the pupils out for training gallops along the roads and in the public park. The boy could ride like a young centaur. He seemed to manage his horse as unconsciously as he managed his breathing—he breathed, and he rode. One of the girls who took riding-lessons of the livery-stable keeper was the daughter of a distinguished advocate and Queen's counsel, Mr. Fanshawe, who came of good family, had a great practice, and, being a northern man by birth, had bought a property near the town where the livery-stables were kept. This daughter got her lessons in riding mostly from the livery-stable keeper; but sometimes, too, from his son. These two fell in love. After the young man was transferred to the office they corresponded, and occasionally contrived to meet. He succeeded in convincing her that he was a man of genius in a position wholly beneath him, and before whom one day the world must come to bow down.

Why had he got it into his head that he was a man of genius and a master-spirit? He had as yet done nothing. He had not even written poems or essays or begun a tragedy. He had not made speeches. He was curiously ignorant on most subjects. His reading had been only a few biographies of men who had risen from lowliness to greatness, some metaphysical books of a cheap and easy kind, the "Count of Monte Cristo," and a life of Mahomet. At the office

even the clerks of his own age thought him a stupid fellow. His father never could make much of him, and feared he was hopelessly incapable of getting on, but overlooked all his defects because of the memory of his mother, who died young. Yet it was settled in the young man's mind that he was a child of genius and of destiny, and that the world was yet to hear the loud echo of his tread. Most ambitious and clever or silly young men, when they have such convictions about themselves, have also in their minds some idea as to the path along which they are to move to greatness. One believes himself a poet, another a statesman, another a Michael Angelo of the future, the coming Garrick, the Cæsar of the modern time; but our young man had no set notion of this kind. He had not yet made up his mind as to the sort of greatness he was to have. He was not clear even as to the sort of greatness he should wish to have. He only said to himself that greatness was his destiny, and left Fate to do her duty. Perhaps it was his figure; perhaps his beautiful deep, dark, dreamy eyes; perhaps his singularly handsome face, looking a little like that of a young Lucifer before the rebellion and the fall; certain it is that he easily convinced Miss Fanshawe that in loving him she loved dawning genius and predestined greatness.

It was not for that Miss Fanshawe loved him. She did not care whether he had genius or not,

whether he became great or remained small. She loved him because she loved him: loved him for himself. So she at last "kicked over the traces," as the livery-stable keeper expressed it, and married her lover in defiance of her father, mother, and all her friends. From the day when she left their house secretly to be married, her father and mother never saw her again. Not that they would not have been reconciled with her in time; but they waited for her to submit, and she waited for them; and some months beyond a year passed away, and then their daughter was dead. She died a few days after the scene in the park, in child-birth—if that can be called child-birth which brings forth only a dead child.

Had she in the later days of their married life been touched by any doubts as to the true worth of her idol? Probably not. Probably she had only been hurt now and then at the thought that love was not enough for him. It is all the same now—she is gone for ever.

On the very morning before her death, the child of genius received a formal dismissal from Messrs. Aquitaine's office. He was considered incapable and idle, and they would have no more of him. He sat all the night with his dead wife and his ruined hopes. He had not gone near his father for months and months, proudly convinced that they were not made for each other; and he would not go near him now. He sat all the

night alone and steeped in thought. All had gone from him. He was down to the lowest deeps of depth. He had not a friend on earth. He had only a few pounds in money, and even that was the poor wreck and remnant of some money *she* had had left to her by a relative in days when there did not seem the slightest probability of her ever having any occasion to spend it. Such was his state. Clearly, if he was to be taken in hand by Destiny, the time had about arrived when Destiny ought to be looking after her charge.

At the funeral of his wife, his father presented himself. They exchanged a grasp of the hand—very warm on the father's part. The livery-stable keeper asked him to come to his house and stay there. He said he would go there later in the day; and the father felt for him and quietly left him, expecting him to come in the evening, when perhaps he should have calmed down a little. But he did not come that day, nor the next. He never came. He never wrote. His father might have supposed that his son was dead, perhaps had killed himself, but that an acquaintance had seen the young man going on board a steamer, and the young man had told him hurriedly that he was leaving England. He always did things in an odd sort of way, the father said. Anyhow, he was gone.

CHAPTER II.

HELENA AND HERMIA.

CHANGE is rapid in the seaport town where the two married lovers saw the sun set that evening fifteen or sixteen years ago. There are many quiet inland towns of England even still—for all the railways, and the telegraph, and the electric light—where no greater innovation has been made within that time than the adornment of the principal inn with a new sign, or at most the starting of a rival hostelry. But in this busy, unresting place of which we are speaking, new suburbs, stretching for miles, have grown up; acres of newly built docks have encroached upon the river's banks; sweet spots that were greenwood by the water in the love-making days of pretty Miss Fanshawe are now occupied by factories and warehouses; the very park in which the lovers sat that evening was cut up soon after and parcelled out in lots for building, and is now fully built over. The park was not large enough for the increasing population, and a splendid new park, of much larger extent and greater pretensions, was opened at the opposite end of the town. On the very spot where the poor absurd child of genius sat and bemoaned himself that he had not yet

found a career; where his young wife looked up into his face with anxious eyes, that might have been lit by corpse-candles, so ominous was their gleam—on that very spot now, perhaps, some happily married pair were settled down under their own roof-tree, and gladsome children were playing in the nursery. In our civil life, new crops of houses and hearths grow up on the field where lovers, seeking solitude, were glad or grieved once, just as grass and flowers spring up on the plains where a battle has been fought.

The public park of the past day had been planted in one of the most beautiful suburbs of the town. It stood on the slope of a very gentle hill and was sheltered from the east wind which vexed people a great deal in the long and chilly springs; and it looked at one side across the river, there safe even still from the incursion of the dock and warehouse builder. The river was broad there; as it went on through the town, it spread out into a mighty estuary; but even here it was a noble stream. So the place where the park had been was turned into the site of one of the favourite nests of the local aristocracy—the men who had made fortunes in shipping and on 'Change, and in all manner of commercial adventures and enterprises. They built themselves lordly pleasure-houses there. They built "detached villas," and each man called his villa by some commanding name. They had conservatories and

bright gardens below and observatories on the tops of their houses. Some loved great flights of stone steps, with peacocks parading themselves on terraces. As time went on, and fashions in building began to change, some had fantastic houses of red brick, made more intensely Queen-Anneish than anything of Queen Anne's day could possibly have been, or, even for that matter, than Queen Anne herself. Little windows started out like Jacks-in-the-box exactly where they might least have been expected, with bars across them where there was not the slightest necessity for such precaution. Glass was specially manufactured of a thick greenish dinginess, and with bull's-eyes elaborately wrought in, so that the known imperfections of the glass-making craft in the Augustan age of English letters should add to the reality of the careful imitation. It was said by the friends of one of the enthusiasts in the cause of this architectural revival that he had little mechanical spiders ingeniously constructed to run up and down some of his window-panes, in order to give to his mansion the greater air of eighteenth-century realism, by suggesting the domestic untidiness of the days of Dean Swift. But this seems only like the foolish pleasantry of some outshone rival. It was probably just such a piece of idle invention as the story told of a lover of art in the same quarter, who had his own portrait done by a great London artist, and when it came home had it put

up one of the chimneys for some time, to smoke it into respectability of appearance, and then spent a whole evening bending and cracking it in all directions, so that its surface might seem like that of some of the masterpieces he had seen in the National Portrait Gallery.

One, at least, of the red-brick houses in this region was really modest and tasteful in its style and all its arrangements. It wore its Queen Anne garb with the quiet ease of one who, having chosen a suitable fancy costume for a masquerade, is able to wear it properly and becomingly. This house belonged to Mr. Aquitaine, head of a great firm of shippers. Mr. Aquitaine was of Huguenot descent. His people had been settled in that seaport since the revocation of the edict of Nantes, and had always prospered there. The family now counted among the oldest in the town, and the name had actually become associated with the place. It brought to the ordinary Englishman now no suggestion of Huguenots or foreign origin, but only told of the town in which Mr. Aquitaine lived. His name and that of his family were known all over the world where trade was heard of and ships came into port. Mr. Aquitaine had travelled much in his time, but never called it travelling or thought of himself as a traveller. He had even done some African exploring, for the interest of the thing, but he never for a moment regarded himself as an African explorer. Ever since he was old enough

to be of any use to the great house, he had been in the habit of going off at a moment's notice to any part of the world whither it might be necessary to despatch him. He went to New York or San Francisco as another man might go to Edinburgh or to Paris. He talked of "the last time I was in Melbourne—no, the last time but one, I think it was." If somebody asked him how some friend was getting on in Japan, he might perhaps answer carelessly, "Well, really I don't quite know; I haven't been in Japan for more than three years; I don't go there now." When the diamond fields were discovered in South Africa, he went out two or three times just to have a look at them. He was very glad of the annexation of the Fiji Islands, and remarked that every time he went to Fiji he was more and more impressed with the value of the resources and the position that were neglected there by the English Government. But he was not the least in the world of a wanderer. He never went anywhere without some practical purpose. He belonged, roughly speaking, to all the local boards and institutions of his town. He subscribed to everything. He made no distinction of creed in his gifts and charities, and spoke on the platforms of all denominations in turn.

Mr. Aquitaine was now about sixty years old. He wore a short, thick, white moustache and no beard. For all his generations of family settlement on English soil, he still had a great deal of the

typical Frenchman about him. With a slight change of garb, say to a shabby outworn semi-military undress, he would have been just the sort of man one might expect to meet near that building in Paris which the English lady in "Peregrine Pickle" calls the "Anvil-Heads." Yet he regarded himself as intensely English, and was in all his views of things, political and other, the most inveterate and uncompromising John Bull. He did not like the Americans; he detested the Russians. He had a poor idea of the Germans. His general notion of the way for England to solve any difficult question in foreign affairs was to occupy some place. His way to improve any uncivilised country was for England to annex it. He had always had great ideas of things to be done in the Levant and in Egypt; and he had done one great thing for himself in the Levant; he had found a wife there. He fell in love with a girl in Rhodes, a sort of Greek with an English mother, and he married her and brought her home. She was at that time beautiful, but she had fallen a good deal out of shape lately, and did little more than stay at home, lie on a sofa, and receive her friends. She was at least ten years younger than Mr. Aquitaine; but he had not lost one fibre of his youthful energy, and she had not a fibre left of hers. They had been married very nearly five-and-twenty years, and for five years had had no child. Then Mr. Aquitane had one

daughter, and they had no children after. They lived very happily after their fashion. Mr. and Mrs. Aquitaine hardly ever saw each other alone except of night, and not always even then. He would not have her disturbed, and she liked going to bed early. He had therefore a bedroom fitted up for himself on the ground-floor, and whenever he was disposed to sit up late or to rise specially early, was starting off on a journey, or had just come back from some expedition, he betook himself to this room, and so spared the quiet habits of his wife. The house was always more or less full of company. The family never by any chance had it all to themselves. The three would hardly have known it or themselves under such conditions.

A young lady is mounting a flight of stairs in Mr. Aquitaine's house one bright morning in the early spring: she is running very briskly up, and evidently is not troubled with shortness of breath. She is a good-looking girl with a certain serious look, and a way of slightly puckering her eyebrows every now and then as though she were in earnest about things. She had evidently been out-of-doors, for she wore a hat, beneath which only a little of her carefully tucked-up fair hair made its appearance. She reaches a door and knocks: no answer comes from within. Then she called "Melissa!" two or three times, and knocked

a little more sharply. A faint voice seemed to be heard, languid, and far away.

"Melissa! may I come in?"

Another murmur was heard, which the young lady on the outside assumed to be assent. At all events, she tried the door, found that it was not locked, and went into the room. It was a very large room, and she looked about with a puzzled air.

"Where on earth is the child?" she said aloud.

The room was not furnished after the fashion of sleeping-chambers in the days of Mrs. Masham and Sarah Jennings. It was all got up in some combination or jumble of various Eastern fashions. The ceilings and the wall were painted after the style of a great Moorish building. The floors were tessellated marble, with scattered pieces of Turkish carpet, and piles of cushions here and there. One corner suggested Damascus, and another Delhi. It was very Oriental—almost as much so as some of the Oriental courts in the Crystal Palace, of which, indeed, it at first reminded Miss Sydney Marion, who stood, now looking at its various adornments, still holding the handle of the door, and hardly certain whether to go in or to back out. Opening from the other side of the room she saw a little passage, marble-paved and carpet-betossed too, and she could see that it led into a gorgeous-looking bath-room, the

entrance of which was half draped by a carelessly gathered-up curtain. These decorations and appointments illustrated the tastes, not of Mr. Aquitaine, but of his wife and daughter. Was there no occupant of this superb sleeping saloon? Miss Marion looked around in wonder, and might have backed out altogether, but that a faint laugh drew her attention to one spot where she saw a curtain hanging before a sort of recess. She went up, drew the curtain, and discovered a small alcove with a most luxurious bed, and a very luxurious little demoiselle coiled up in it.

"Oh! there you are at last!" Miss Marion said, and she shook her friend by the shoulder.

A murmur only was heard.

"Get up, you dreadful lazy little girl; see how the sun is shining! It is so delicious; it's not like anything I ever saw before. Do promise me that you will get up at once."

The pretty girl languidly half-opened her dark brown eyes, and gave another toss or two in her bed, and shrugged herself together again.

"Do get up, Melissa! won't you, like a dear girl?"

"But I don't want to get up, Sydney. What's the good of getting up?—I've often been up."

"The lovely morning, the sun, the flowers——"

"I've seen the sun, and the flowers, all sorts of flowers—I don't care about flowers—I don't care about the sun; I prefer the moon."

"But last night you said you would not come out to see the moon. You said you didn't care about the moon."

"I didn't then: but that was night. This is morning; that makes all the difference. Don't you see?"

Miss Marion laughed.

"I fancy it does make all the difference, and I do see well enough. What a tormenting little dear you are, to be sure! But I do want you to enjoy the morning with me; or I want rather to enjoy the morning with you. You'll come down, won't you, to please me? I am like the little boy in the old nursery story, or something of that kind, who went about teasing all manner of unwilling creatures, the sheep, and the dog, and the cat, and I don't know what, to come and play with him."

"Which am I — the sheep, the dog, or the cat?"

"Oh! you are none of these — the leopard kitten, perhaps; if such a creature is nice and lazy, and what people call aggravating; if so, there you are."

"Well, it's all right; I'll get up," said the lazy girl resignedly. "One must get up some time in the day, and it is as well to do it now as later, I suppose; that's philosophy, I should think."

"Hang up philosophy," said Sydney.

"Come, now, you are always telling me I say

rude things and use slang words. What do you say to 'hang up philosophy'?"

"But that's a quotation, Melissa, it's from Shakespeare. Don't you know?"

"Then Shakespeare must have been a very vulgar man," the young lady said decisively. Having thus settled the question, she rolled herself up in a significant way and was silent, thereby implying that the sooner her friend left her the sooner she would get up and prepare to enter on the business and pleasures of the day.

"Just one word, Melissa: you won't go to sleep again?"

"Glamis," the young lady murmured from among her pillows— "that's *you*— hath murdered sleep, and therefore Cawdor—that's me; I know I ought to say 'that's' I, but doesn't it sound odd? and therefore Cawdor—that's I or *me*, whichever you please—shall sleep no more."

"I thought just now you seemed to know nothing about Shakespeare," said Sydney.

"That's not Shakespeare; it's Henry Irving."

"What a ridiculous creature! You know a great deal more than you pretend to."

"All right, dear; most people pretend to a great deal more than they know; I may want to redress the balance, don't you see? Well, I'll not go to sleep again. Would you mind sending Priscilla to me if you see her? or if you would just ring the bell for her before you leave the

the room, that would save a second or two, perhaps; and a second saved is a second earned."

Miss Marion laughed and rang the bell for Melissa's maid, and then left her companion, and went downstairs and out into the garden. The little sensuous maiden above-stairs hugged herself once or twice deliciously in her wrappings. The morning was mild and soft, and suggested no great need of nestling in bedclothes. But this was a young lady who immensely loved comfort and warmth and indolence, and harmless little luxuries and self-indulgences of all kinds. During the few moments which elapsed before her maid came into the room she had changed her position several times; not that she found herself uneasy in any, but that even for that moment it delighted her to try for some posture of still greater comfort, to seek the ideal position of the moment. But when her maid came and told her her tepid bath was ready, she made a heroine-like effort and actually got up.

It may be safely asserted of Miss Aquitaine that she never yet had had one thought that lasted for a moment concerning any creature or subject outside the range of her own personal impulses, whims, and wishes. Her impulses were often kind and sometimes generous, and then she was kind and generous for the moment; but she never thought of being kind or generous, or did anything, because it ought to be done. She was

keenly sensitive to pain herself, but never seemed to have got far enough outside her own personal sensations to think whether others were affected by pain or not. She had not the least idea of the value of money, and indeed, hardly ever had money in her purse, or even in her hand. Everything was bought for her that she wished to have; many things were bought for her before she had time to wish to have them. Her father and mother had made her their little idol and fetish from the days of her birth. Having no other child, they were always wildly alarmed about the health of this one little treasure. Up to the present hour it was an article of faith in the household that Melissa was in delicate health and required constant care. The girl never had a cough or a cold in her life, was ignorant of the pangs of toothache, and did not know that she had lungs and digestive organs. The superb strength of her constitution could not be better evidenced than by the fact that it had hitherto withstood all the attempts of her father and mother to keep her well, and all her own attempts to make herself ill. She ate and drank whatever she liked, sat up as late as she liked, took six warm baths in one day if she felt inclined. She often did feel inclined to paddle in her bath for hours together, like a South Sea Island girl plashing idly in her sunny waters.

Melissa took a long time to get bathed and dressed, and she did not hasten movements in the

least because of her waiting friend. She was very fond of Miss Sydney Marion, but she did not mind letting her wait. In fact, she never thought about the matter at all. Miss Marion was carried off to breakfast by her host, who assured her it would not be of the slightest use waiting for Melissa, as no one could tell when she would come down, or whether she would have any breakfast when she did come. Miss Marion was out again on the lawn looking at the sparkling waters of the river, all wrinkled and rippling under the light spring wind, when her friend at last came to her side. Melissa was short and dark, with a graceful plumpness which might perhaps in some far off time develop, as her mother's had done, into what blunt persons would call fat. Just now, however, no one would be likely to find fault. Melissa was a little beauty, and thought so.

"How you must love this river!" Sydney Marion said. She came from a quiet cathedral town, far inland. Her mother was dead; her father and sister were not now in England; she had been staying with an aunt until yesterday, when she came to pass some time with her father's friends, Mr. and Mrs. Aquitaine, and her school-fellow, Melissa. She had never been in their house before, and everything was new and delightful to her.

"I don't care a pin about it," Melissa said. "It's always the same dull thing flowing in the same stupid way. Everything is dull. Nothing

ever happens. One gets awfully tired. I want something new. If only something would happen!"

"But something always is happening."

"Oh, no! oh, dear, no! not anything that I call something. I want something quite remarkable to happen."

"Well, something is happening that I call very remarkable. Don't you call papa's coming home, and coming to stay here, something remarkable? Don't you call our all going to London together something remarkable?"

"Yes, of course; yes, quite so." The young lady did not appear to be taken all of a heap by the reminder. "Yes; I am very glad of your papa's coming home, for your sake, dear Sydney."

"And I hope you are glad of it, too, for your own sake?"

"Indeed I am," Melissa answered, with a little more earnestness in her tone. "I know I shall like him very much."

"Like him! No; that's not enough. You must be very fond of him. You will be."

"I am sure I shall."

"Well, then, that is something remarkable; and I call it remarkable, too, that he should bring Miss Rowan along with him."

"That is perhaps a little remarkable," Melissa said demurely. "Do you think you shall like her?"

"Yes; I am sure I shall. She is very lovely, I believe, and full of enthusiasm about everything."

"Full of enthusiasm about everything! That must be rather trying and tiresome, mustn't it?"

"Not in her, Melissa, I believe; not in her."

"She must be a regular charmer!"

"I believe she is."

"Who told you all this about her?" Melissa asked, with a slightly quickened interest in her manner.

"Papa, of course."

"Oh! 'Papa, of course'! Yes. Indeed? Does he greatly admire her?"

"Very much, I think. He has quite an affection for her, I am sure."

"Oh!"

There was silence for half a moment, and then Melissa looked up to her companion, and complacently said: "Perhaps he'll marry her!"

"Who, Melissa—marry whom?"

"Your papa—'papa, of course'—perhaps he'll marry this delightful Miss Rowan?"

Sidney frowned a little, and her lip quivered.

"You don't know papa, Melissa."

"But why, Sydney? Why shouldn't he marry her, if he is so fond of her? Of course one doesn't like having a stepmother, and all that; but I suppose these sort of people are not so cruel now as they used to be; and besides, you admire her so much yourself. I should think it would be quite a delightful arrangement for all parties. I

am sure there is something in it. You may depend upon it, Sydney, things will end that way."

Miss Marion was going at first to allow herself to be very angry; but she thought it would be ridiculous to take any serious notice of such nonsense, and she was beginning to understand her friend's childlike delight in inflicting little punctures of annoyance every now and then. She did not allow herself to be angry, therefore, or even grave.

"You little silly goose," she said, "to talk that way of papa! And I can assure you that I don't believe Miss Rowan is the girl to marry in in such a way."

"But your papa is very nice, isn't he—clever, and all that? You always say so. And tall and handsome, isn't he? Why shouldn't she marry him?"

"Stuff, Melissa!"

"I'll marry him if he asks me—fast enough," the little lady said, very composedly. "That would be something happening! But I am sure he won't ask me."

"I am quite sure he won't," Sydney replied with emphasis.

"Yes? — I don't know. I think he might do worse. I should like immensely to be your step-mother. I should be awfully severe. Well, never mind; let us talk of something else. But first, one word about this Miss Rowan."

"You will see her soon, and then you can form an opinion of her for yourself."

"But it was about your opinion of her I wanted to know something. You never saw her?"

"Never."

"Yet you like her?"

"I know I shall like her very much."

"Because your papa likes her?"

"Quite so, Melissa."

"Then do tell me, are you really such an awfully good girl that you actually like people because your parents—I mean your father—likes them?"

"I don't know about being an awfully good girl; indeed, I know I am not an awfully good girl; but it does seem a reason for liking people if one's father likes them, does it not?"

"Oh, dear, no; quite the reverse, I should say. If papa and mamma like people very much, my natural impulse always is to dislike them. I thought that was every one's first impulse. How can one like anybody whom every one else is always praising—especially one's parents? If I hear them praise any other girl, I always take it as a reproach dealt sidelong to myself. It always seems to mean, 'Why are not you a dear, charming, delightful, virtuous angel like this? Why are you not the prop of your father's old age, and the joy of your mother's decaying years, like this blessed creature?' And then, of course, one na-

turally begins to hate the blessed creature, and to think what a great disagreeable impostor she must be."

Miss Marion made no comment on these words. They seemed to have set her thinking.

"Sydney, you haven't told me anything about your sister. You know I never saw her."

"You will soon see her too; I'll leave you to judge for yourself."

"Don't you like her?"

"My dear little Melissa, what a question!"

"No, but don't you? Don't you, really?"

"Like my sister? Of course I do."

"But you don't get on, perhaps?"

"Well, we have not been much together this long time."

"I am sure there is something!" Melissa said triumphantly. "I am so glad! I like to hear of people who don't get on and all that. They seem more like myself. I shall like you ever so much better if you quarrel with your sister; and I shall like her if she quarrels with you. I shall devote myself to the task of making mischief between you. That might be something happening."

"What a dreadful little animal you would be," Miss Marion said, "if you were only a quarter as bad as you make yourself out! But you can't set any quarrel going between Katherine and me;

and I know you wouldn't if you could. I almost wish you could, Melissa."

"Oh! why?" Melissa asked with eyes of beaming curiosity.

"I am not sure that I quite know why; and I am sure that if I did I wouldn't tell you, you naughty little child."

"How disagreeable of you! You won't tell me anything."

"I think I have told you a great deal."

"Then, if I can't set you two women quarelling, I'll tell you what I will do. I'll start a flirtation with your sister's husband, and make her awfully jealous; that will be capital fun."

Sydney only laughed at this resolve.

"You'll not be able to do that either," she said.

"Why not?"

"Well, for one thing, I think Mr. Trescoe isn't given to flirtation. He is terribly shy; Katherine does all the flirtation that is likely to go on there, I fancy."

"Then there will be all the more fun in drawing him out, won't there? I must be doing something, Sydney; you are all going to be so awfully happy and fond of one another, and I shall be left out in the cold; and if I am not to marry your papa, I really must get up a flirtation with your brother-in-law. Is he nice? Is he handsome—is your sister the grey mare? Oh!

I say, let us talk of something else. Here's papa coming; he will think me dreadfully silly."

"I don't see how he could well think anything else," said Sydney. "But I'll not tell tales on you, if you will only promise to be more reasonable for the future."

"Indeed, I won't promise anything of the kind; I must do mischief of some sort, flirting or quarrelling, or something. How do you do, papa? We have been talking about philosophy and the future life—Sydney and I."

CHAPTER III.

"WHAT'S IN THE SHIP?—MY SHIPWRECK?"

MR. AQUITAINE came towards the girls. He looked like a young man when seen at a little distance, so straight, strong, and active was his frame. He was rapid and vigorous in his walk, and held his head up with a quick business-like air, the air of a man always ready. He was never slow or undecided in any of his movements; and he never seemed to be in a hurry. He had apparently contrived to combine the vivacity of his ancestral home with the solid composure of the country his people had adopted. He was smoking a cigar; he wore driving gloves, and had a camellia in his button-hole nearly as large a star as fish.

"I'm going to show you everything while you are here, Miss Marion. We'll take a tremendous drive to-day to begin with; only you and Mel and I. My wife never goes out of the house. The only question is, what to begin at. What are your particular tastes in the way of towns and sight-seeing, Miss Marion? We have got all manner of things on exhibition: river-scenery, landscape, streets, docks, museums, what not. Are you interested in docks?"

"Dear papa, how could Sydney be interested in docks? What girl ever cared about docks? You might as well ask her if she felt interested in tobacco-warehouses."

"Well, there's a good deal to interest one in the tobacco-warehouses. I'll give her a look at them too."

"I like to see everything," Sydney said. "I love the great broad river because it is so new to me, and so unlike anything we have at home. But I think I should very much like to see your schools—the board-schools."

Melissa made a grimace expressive of the profoundest distaste for this branch of study.

"And I should like very much to go through the poorest quarters of the town; the streets where the low public-houses and beer-shops are, and the lanes and alleys, and such places."

"I am sure I don't want to see any such places," Miss Aquitaine declared, with a shudder

at the mere thought of their existence. "What a strong-minded girl you are! I should never have thought it—with that fair hair too, and that complexion."

"Very good," Mr. Aquitaine said. "You are quite right, Miss Marion; I am glad to hear you have an interest in such things. I thought it was only up here in the North that women cared much for the condition of the poor, and the schools, and all that. You may depend upon it, I'll take care that you see everything. But Mel won't come. She wouldn't take any interest; and she is hardly strong enough; it's a little beyond her."

This was quite enough to determine "Mel" on going.

"Then I am to be left behind to my own company?" she said, "while you two go exploring and seeing all manner of odd sights! Excuse me, sir und madam, I'll go too. It will be delightful. Quite the Caliph Haroun-Al-Raschid sort of thing. Look here, Sydney, I vote we dress in men's clothes."

"Some of mine," Mr. Aquitaine suggested. He was about five feet ten; Melissa about five feet nothing.

"Anyhow, I'll go," his daughter insisted.

"All right, girl," her father said complacently. Suddenly remembering something, he turned to Miss Marion:—

"I forgot to say I had a letter from your father this morning, Miss Marion."

She gave an exclamation of eager delight.

"But it tells us nothing—I mean, nothing that you don't know already. It was written days and days before he left New York, and you know we have had telegrams from him since. We had one after he had actually left New York, sent back in the pilot-boat from Sandy Hook. So, of course, his letter tells us nothing so far as that is concerned; we know he has sailed, and you may make your mind quite easy about him and his companions. They have splendid weather, and a good wind to help them along. They must be half-way across by this time."

"How soon shall we see him?" Sydney asked anxiously—and she asked only for *him*.

"Oh, well, in a very few days. We shall hear from them when they get to Queenstown. Don't you be anxious; don't think about it at all. He'll be here before you know where you are; before we have half done these schools. By the way, they have rather a remarkable fellow-passenger, he tells me."

Sydney did not seem to care much about the remarkable fellow-passenger. But Mr. Aquitaine liked instructing people about all manner of subjects, and having the first of everything. He was not going to let Miss Marion escape the remarkable fellow-passenger so easily.

"You have heard of Montana, Miss Marion, I am sure?"

"A place in America?" Miss Marion said a little doubtfully.

"Yes, there is a Montana in America, sure enough; but it isn't that Montana that is coming over in the steamer."

Miss Marion shook her head: she did not know of any other Montana. Mr. Aquitaine was glad, on the whole; it gave him the more to tell.

"Is Montana a man or a woman?" his daughter asked.

"Montana is a man."

"Sounds more like a woman, doesn't it?" Melissa observed.

"No; it's a queer name, when one comes to think of it; not an American name, certainly. But I don't suppose Montana is an American, except perhaps by birth; I fancy he hails from somewhere in Europe. Anyhow, he is a very remarkable man, Miss Marion. They were talking a great deal about him when I was last in the States, but I never happened to see him."

"I thought every one was a remarkable man in America," Melissa interposed.

Her father went on, addressing himself to Sydney, "This is really a man out of the common—I have never heard how he began; but he was a soldier in the war—the great civil war, you know; and he left what they call a good record

there, and now he is a lecturer, or preacher, or something of the kind, and the head of a great new school, and has what people call a mission of some sort. I have no doubt he is coming to Europe on some mission."

"He must be a tiresome old man," Melissa observed in her genial way. "I hate people with missions."

"It is interesting," Miss Marion said after a moment. "I wonder, will papa like him? He doesn't generally like strangers."

"People are not strangers to each other on board an ocean steamer," Mr. Aquitaine said. "Come, young ladies, get ready, and let us be moving; we have a great deal to see."

"Ah, yes," Melissa assented, with a sigh of anticipatory weariness. Sydney heard her, and was almost inclined to feel hurt. But Melissa smiled on her with such a pretty saucy smile of innocent infantile wilfulness that it was impossible to feel angry; impossible not to laugh with the tormenting little creature. Sydney looked anxiously along the river before turning away; it was still all sparkling and full of hope to see. If it had been dark, and the ripples had been ruffled ever so little more than when she first looked on it that morning, she might have taken it as an evil augury. But it still sparkled as if it had only to bear up vessels with youth at their prow and pleasure at their helm; pretty dancing things made

in the shape of sea-shells with silken sails, and little cupids playing at seamen, and nereids swimming all around and occasionally pushing the boat along in sport with their dripping shoulders. Sydney was not, in truth, so foolish as to be greatly alarmed about the dangers of the deep for people crossing the Atlantic in fine spring weather and in a great steamer. But she had an anxious way about most things. She was commonly uneasy about her own people, about her father whom she loved, and her sister whom she tried to love. She was almost always thinking whether this or that would be agreeable to her father or not. If anybody were to mention anything in connection with her father's name, her first thought was one of anxious wonder as to whether her father would find himself pleased or not pleased. Now she was distressing her mind a little about the remarkable person coming over in the steamer with Captain Marion, and wondering whether her father would find the companionship an advantage or a nuisance on the voyage.

They saw a great many sights that day and for two or three days following. Mr. Aquitaine was determined to keep Sydney going incessantly, in order that she might not have too much time to think of her father on the sea. He took care that the girl should be very tired when she returned to dinner every day; and he had always

a number of people to dine with them. He left her few moments for anxious meditation.

Mr. Aquitaine found that in all things, apart from her over-anxious ways about her father, he had a decidedly practical young woman to deal with in Sydney Marion. He was used to practical girls in the North, but he was under the impression that no such creatures came from the south. He had not faith in the practical work of man or woman below Birmingham, but he was especially inclined to put little faith in the business capacity of woman. In the North, indeed, there were so many practical and efficient women, that perhaps it made home life a pleasant variety to Mr. Aquitaine to have his wife and daughter so absolutely devoid of the practical element. Mrs. Aquitaine was still as ignorant of the working of English domestic, political, or social institutions, as if she had never been out of the Levantine region, and had never read a book or asked a question about England. Melissa did not know, and did not intend to know, anything about such dry subjects as laws and institutions. Mrs. Aquitaine could not have understood if she would; Melissa could have understood, but would not. Mr. Aquitaine was surprised to find how like a genuine Northern girl Sydney Marion was in many ways. She showed a deep interest in schools and workhouses and ventilation, and even rates and taxes. She wanted to know the averages of every-

thing. She examined the little boys and girls at various board-schools, and praised some of those institutions and gravely shook her young head at others.

"Where did you get all this common sense, Miss Marion?" Mr. Aquitaine once bluntly asked. "I am sure your father hadn't much of it; and from what I saw of your sister Katherine I don't think she was richly endowed with it either."

Sydney could not, perhaps, have well explained. Yet the causes were not far to seek. She was three years older than her sister Katherine, and, when their mother died, she was left in charge of the household, being then only eighteen. She soon found that the household had been going to rack and ruin for a good long time before. Her mother was a sweet, bright, clever creature who always looked young, always kept young in face and in heart, was loved by every one, and let things go as they would. Captain Marion had been in the army for a short time, but had sold out when he got married, and settled down to enjoy domestic life, and cultivate his literary tastes. He meant to write a book. He was still writing it. He had put most of his own money and his wife's into American railways, and for a long time it seemed as if he might as well have deposited it in the Atlantic. Sydney had some trouble to keep things straight for a while; and not the least of her troubles was the effort

to induce her younger sister to put up with any manner of little privation without too much grumbling. Katherine was very vain, and soon grew mightily fond of admiration, and could hardly endure a life of restriction and dulness. Now, however, the railway property was at last coming to be a genuine thing; Captain Marion seemed likely to be a man of means again. He had gone out to the States to look after his affairs there, and to have the pleasant holiday of a successful man who combines business with pleasure and enjoys both.

Why did not Sydney go with him? Well, Sydney was a sort of pretty girl; but somehow she was not attractive. There are fashions in beauty as capricious, and for their time as inexorable, as the fashions in dress. It is easy to believe in the satirist's account of what happened when the vision of Helen of Troy was conjured up to delight the eyes of a modern group of spectators. The ladies all declared that she was a mere fright and dowdy. It was not their jealousy; the expression was doubtless quite sincere. Helen's beauty was not the reigning style, and to them it was the same thing as ugliness. Sydney Marion was by no means a Helen; but her face might have been thought handsome in the days when oval faces and high foreheads were assumed to be the portion of every true heroine. But by the time she was able to come out in the living world

and emerge a little from the almost cloister-like retirement of the cathedral town and her family difficulties, that style of beauty had passed utterly out of fashion. She ought to have a square-cut face and a long chin, and Nature had denied her these attractions. Her hair ought to have come down in a fringe over her forehead, and it refused to do so of itself, and she would not use artificial means to coerce it. Her sister Katherine used to be thought rather a little fright in her school-days, because of her tiny turn-up nose, her sharp chin, and her unmanageable hair. Now she was regarded by every one as the beauty of the family. Sydney Marion's face was an anachronism; and she was set down as old-fashioned. No doubt the fashion would change, and the oval faces and high foreheads might have their day again; but Sydney Marion's youth would hardly wait for that revenge of time. She was already in her twenty-fifth year.

Perhaps the consciousness that her face was out of fashion helped to make her somewhat practical and opinionated. She seemed to most people a little hard. She kept her mind somewhat too well regulated. She could have fallen in love, and was longing to love some one; but she had not as yet had a chance. She was wildly fond of her father and her mother; and it always seemed to her that both preferred Katherine. She adored her father, and she felt sure that, with his

equable temper and his love for philosophical justice, he must think her a better girl and more devoted daughter than Katherine; and yet he seemed to enjoy Katherine's society more. A handsome young man used to visit them in their country obscurity, the eldest son of Sir Stephen Trescoe, a neighbouring landlord, and Sydney thought she could love him, felt herself drawn towards him, was sure she could confide in him, almost fancied he seemed to show some feeling with regard to her; and he proposed for Katherine, and was accepted, and evidently believed he had carried off the most delightful woman in the world. There was some fear lest young Trescoe's stately and rich family might dislike a marriage with the daughter of a man who appeared to be poor; but no sooner was Katherine seen by the lover's father and mother than they were captivated by her, and metaphorically clasped her to their bosoms. Sydney felt certain that if it had been she they would have been sure to object decidedly to the match. When the young married pair resolved to go with Captain Marion to the States, Sydney made some excuse for remaining behind, and her father, perhaps divining her feelings—he was very quick and sympathetic—fell in with her ideas, and she was left at home to wear her green stockings unseen. Now another alarm had sprung in her mind; a vague alarm, indeed, and with no reason that she could put into words. Captain

Marion had met in the States the daughter of a dear old friend, Colonel Rowan, an Irish officer who had served with him during his short military career. Colonel Rowan was dead long ago, and his widow and daughter had gone out to the United States and taken up their residence with Mrs. Rowan's sister. In some out-of-the-way town—or city, its inhabitants would proudly call it—Captain Marion sought them out, and so warmly renewed in them his friendship for Colonel Rowan, that the daughter was prevailed upon to come over to England with the returning party. Sydney heard of almost nothing but the beauty, the grace, the cleverness, the brightness, the accomplishments, the enthusiasm, the affection, the daughterly tenderness, the noble aspirations, and what not of this unique young lady. The whole party, Captain Marion, Katherine, Katherine's husband, seemed in a conspiracy to sound Miss Rowan's praises. Now an alarm arose in Sydney's heart. It was not of the nature that Melissa Aquitaine had kindly suggested. She had not the remotest idea that her father would marry the incomparable young Irish-American. But there was a young man who used to come to see the Aquitaines very often, a young barrister, who belonged to that part of the country, and came that circuit waiting for the time when he should have briefs; and Sydney was a good deal taken with him, he seemed so straightforward and manly and intelligent; and he seemed

to like her. He was evidently not in love with Melissa, and Melissa did not care about him. He had known her since she was a child; he used to call her "Mel," and chaff her, and be saucily chaffed by her, and it was clearly impossible that such two could ever be in love. Sydney had sometimes, in the most secret recesses of her heart, imagined that he looked at her with eyes of kindly emotion. And now, behold! she is threatened with the invasion of a distractingly delightful and wonderful girl, and it is certain that the moment young Mr. Fanshawe sees Miss Rowan he will fall straightway in love with her. Sydney could not even have the luxury of hating the supposed rival. She was unfortunately too just in mind for that. She was too like her father. She knew it. She knew that if Miss Rowan really turned out worthy of regard, she could never help liking her, even though the girl were to come between her and her dearest hopes. For the moment Sydney was vexed with herself for her absurdly critical and judicial nature, and wished she could hate people for nothing, as Katherine would do, and feel no scruples of conscience. She was accustomed to think a 'good deal and to study her own mind, and, without any egotism, she knew herself and her own weaknesses pretty well, and she knew that she had a nervous kind of foible for justice, something akin to a physical nervousness, which she could not

get over, and which would make her impotent to hate even her enemies—if she had any enemies—and they were not wholly in the wrong. She looked forward with a sinking heart to the coming of this odiously bewitching and cruelly admirable stranger—and Miss Rowan was to go with them to London; to stay a long time with them there; and young Fanshawe lived in London.

“Come, Miss Marion — come, Mel,” Mr. Aquitaine exclaimed one morning. “No time to lose; the *Transatlantic* is signalled. We shall only have time to drive down and get on board the tender.”

“The *Transatlantic* — to-day?” Sydney exclaimed, turning pale, and trembling with delight and with the nervous alarm which even delight brings to sensitive and anxious persons.

“Just so. I didn’t tell you she was expected so soon. I didn’t want you to be exciting yourself before there was any occasion, and counting the moments.”

Mr. Aquitaine’s shrewd mind had long since seen into the temper and nature of Sydney Marion.

“Now then, young women, get ready. I’ll rattle you down in rather considerably less than no time. My horses can go like those of Mephistopheles.”

“Perhaps you won’t care to go, Melissa?” Sydney said, turning to Miss Aquitaine, and put-

ting a kindly hand on her shoulder. She did not want Melissa to be tired and bored about people who were not Melissa's father and sister. Perhaps, too, Sydney thought she could be more free to indulge in all her own feelings without the girl.

"Indeed I'll go," Melissa promptly answered. "What an unkind creature you are, Sydney! You know I am longing to see Miss Rowan and Mr. Trescoe, and you know I am only too glad to go in the way of anything out of the regular routine. I want something to happen; not that I think anything will happen to-day."

"One thing will happen, I can assure you," her father said. "We shall be late if you don't be quick; and I know what Captain Marion will feel if he doesn't see his daughter there to meet him."

They were soon on their way.

Sydney Marion's heart beat strongly as the tender approached the great steamer. She kept straining her eyes anxiously for her father's figure long before she could distinguish one form from another. As they drew nearer and nearer she still could not see him. Now she could plainly see the figure of a tall man who was leaning over the side of the steamer, and looking evidently in the direction of the tender. That must surely be her father. Her eyes were sparkling with anxiety. She was now almost near enough to see his face;

it did not seem like the outline of her father's. Nearer and nearer still; and now, gazing anxiously up, her eyes are met by those of a stranger. His eyes look straight into hers, and she looks down in disappointment and with a nameless sensation of discomfort. The man she has seen is handsome; even in that short moment she observed that he had intensely dark hair, and eyes of an almost oppressive brilliancy. Then suddenly she sees that Captain Marion is just behind this man, and she is vexed that any face should have come between her and her father's. She sees her sister and her husband and a girl whom she assumes, of course, to be Miss Rowan. She is hurried up the ladder and on to the deck of the steamer, and her father catches her in his arms.

Meanwhile, Miss Melissa was not particularly anxious about the whole expedition. She was not greatly absorbed in longing to meet Sydney's father; she felt a little interest about the probable appearance of Sydney's sister, and still more about Miss Rowan. She allowed herself to be guided and helped and lifted on to the steamer's deck in a dreamy sort of mood, thinking about hardly anything except the discomfort of steamers in general and the annoyance of having friends who had relations coming from America. In the eagerness of all the others of her party, each hurrying forward to meet somebody or see somebody, little Melissa found herself almost isolated for a

moment. Every one appeared to have forgotten her—a condition of things which was new to her, and which, however short its lasting, was not at all agreeable. She hardly knew where she was going, when suddenly her feet caught in a rope. She staggered and floundered a little, and she might perhaps have fallen but for the promptness of a man who stepped forward just at the right time, and caught her and lifted her safely over the danger. In her odd little languid way she closed her eyes when she found herself slipping and hardly opened them quite until she knew she was firmly and safely on her feet again. There was something strong, gentle, and fatherly in the touch of the hand which held her up, and she thought perhaps it was Sydney's father, and was inclined to make a pretty little filial sort of scene. But opening her eyes, she saw two intensely deep, brilliant eyes looking into hers, and saw that a very tall dark man was her supporter. She quailed under those strange eyes. She felt herself growing red and tremulous. She looked up to him again; their eyes met again. He must have seen that hers sank under his look.

But his face showed not the slightest gleam of interest in her. He had not spoken a word as he was helping her out of her little difficulty; he appeared to take no more interest in her than he would have done in a fallen chair which he happened to lift up. The moment she was safely

on her feet he drew aside without bowing or uttering a word. Melissa tried to say something in the way of thanks, but she could not find speech; and it did not seem as if he was listening for her to speak. He had clearly not given a thought to her. When she was a child she had once taken hold of the handles of an electric battery, and she received a shock of pain that thrilled all through her; and she could not get her hands away, and she could not cry out. Melissa now recalled in a strange, sudden way that long-forgotten sensation, and seemed to feel it once again.

In a moment, however, she is in the centre of the group of greeting friends, and has to make several new acquaintances all at once. The man with the dark eyes is one of them. He is the only one of whose presence she is distinctly conscious. He is first introduced to her father, and then her father presents him to Melissa, and Melissa finds that he is the Mr. Montana, the remarkable fellow-passenger. He does not appear to remember or to know that he has just given her a helping hand. She can only stammer out a wretched unmeaning little word or two, and then somebody else is there. She scarcely knows one from another: she hardly even notices Miss Rowan.

Sydney Marion, too, goes through a series of bewildering experiences. She had hardly been released from the loving embrace of her father when her sister greeted her with a playful pull at

her hair. Her brother-in-law gave her a kindly kiss, which would have been much less embarrassing if he had not hesitated, as if he did not quite know whether he ought to kiss her or not, and then she found herself making the acquaintance almost in a breath of her father's new friends, Miss Rowan and Mr. Montana.

Thought formed and reformed itself in a moment within her mind. "She is very lovely; no, I don't think she is; she is too thin; she has no manner; no, she has too much manner; oh, yes, she is very charming. But what an extraordinary man! Is he very handsome, or is he very ugly? He looks like a prophet. He looks like Monte Cristo. Was he buried alive and dug up again?"

She found herself close to Melissa as they were all preparing to get on board the tender. Melissa looked shaken or affrighted or something of the kind; as if she had fallen and hurt herself, Sydney at first imagined,

"Has anything happened?" she asked in a low voice, and putting her arm round the girl.

"No, nothing," Melissa answered distractedly. Then looking up, and with her old manner, she added, "Oh, no; what could happen? I always told you nothing ever happens."

CHAPTER IV.

A VEILED PROPHET.

MR. MONTANA was to remain only one night in Mr. Aquitaine's house. He was to go on to London by the next morning's train. He had important work to do in London, he said, but he did not explain what it was. He only went so far as to say it was a business which now engrossed his life, and which he would submit to the world for the first time in London.

Mr. Aquitaine noticed that, as they drove from the steamer and passed through the streets of the town, Montana glanced around him inquiringly here and there, as if he were looking out for places he knew.

"You have been in this place before," Mr. Aquitaine said. "I can see that."

"How do you know?" The question was put in cold and cautious tone, and Montana drew himself back in the carriage.

"I see you are looking about inquiringly, as if you were looking out for some place you had known and couldn't find it. Nothing wonderful in that; we make changes very quickly here."

"I have come from a country where changes are quicker," Montana said. He spoke in a deep,

clear voice, habitually monotonous, giving the impression of a total absence of interest in what was going on around. "Yes; I was here long ago; when I was a boy. I hardly recollect it. I am not quite certain sometimes whether I did not only dream of it."

There was not much time that day for the new-comers to see the place, or for either set of persons—those who came from across the sea, or those who welcomed them—to study each other's ways and peculiarities. It was somewhat late when they all reached Mr. Aquitaine's house, and nearly time to dress for dinner. Two or three friends only were invited to meet the new guests. Miss Rowan was seated next to a young man who, some one told her, was a barrister, and whose name was Fanshawe. He did not seem to her in the least like any species of lawyer. He looked very young, to begin with. He was a strong young fellow, slender, but like an athlete in build; he had short curling fair hair, and an audacious yellow moustache; bright blue eyes, a complexion fair as a girl's, and a boyish laugh that spoke a genuine sense of enjoyment. He and she soon became friendly.

"Are you really a lawyer?" she asked him without hesitation.

"A sort of lawyer: yes; a barrister. I believe the two branches are all in one in your country; isn't that so?"

"My country? America is not my country."

"No? I thought it was. I thought you were an American girl. You come from America."

"So does Mrs. Trescoe. Do you call her an American girl?"

"Oh, but she has only been across for a few months or weeks or something. However, if you say you are not an American girl, Miss Rowan, I am sure I believe you. I hope you are not offended with me. I meant no harm: there are some charming American girls."

"I should be very proud of being an American girl if I were one. I don't think there is a more enviable being in the world than an American girl; except one."

"Yes; and who is that one?"

"An American boy, of course."

"Oh, I say!" and Fanshawe laughed.

"But I am not an American girl," Miss Rowan said. "I am Irish; I have only been living in America."

"Do you like America?"

"I love it. So you are really a lawyer?"

"Well, I shall be really a lawyer when the law-going public find out my merits and the solicitors send me briefs—which as yet they have unaccountably omitted to do, perhaps by reason of some vile conspiracy."

"A lawyer! I should never have thought it," Geraldine said meditatively.

"Why not?"

"Well, I thought lawyers were generally old and grizzled and grim, and that they wore spectacles."

"When we are successful we come to that," Fanshawe said gravely. "That's what we look forward to."

"Success is all like that, I really believe," Geraldine said, with earnestness.

"Like what, Miss Rowan?"

"Like that. I am sure you understand. It comes too late to be enjoyed; or if it comes early it often goes too soon. It is bought too dearly. I am sometimes sorry for men because they have to try to be successful. I am glad to be a woman for that reason; we have not to try for it. There is no success for us."

"Except a brilliant match."

"Yes; that is our laurel wreath, our one hope to make life worth enduring. Happily, we are soon put out of pain. The prize does not come with grey hair and spectacles. Our struggle is short. In America we give up at five-and-twenty."

"But you are not five-and-twenty?"

"No; but why do you assume that I have given up?"

"I don't assume anything of the kind. You have only to go in and win."

"Thank you; that was kindly said, but don't try any more like it. Let us not pay compliments."

"Very well. You are going to London soon?"

"Yes; I am longing to go."

"I am very glad you live there."

"Thank you—especially as you banish compliments. Yes—I come from this town; but I live in London now. My father had a place here once, but he sold it. He got not to like it. My sister died here; and he didn't like the whole place any more."

"I am not surprised," said Miss Rowan softly. "The place where one we loved has died; who could bear to see it always?"

"It was a sad story altogether," Fanshawe said. "They had quarrelled, don't you know—at least, you couldn't know, of course; but they had quarrelled—about a love-match my sister would make; and then my people would have made it up gladly, but—well, she died, and there was an end of it. Then my father couldn't stand the place any more, and so he gave it up."

"Was this long ago?" Geraldine asked, hoping that it was long ago, so that the revival of its memory might be less of a pain to the young man.

"Yes, it was a good long time ago—fifteen or sixteen years. I was at school all the time in Germany, and didn't know very much about it until the end."

Geraldine liked the young man's fresh and genial manner. There was something about him sympathetic. His talk was refreshing. For the

rest, the dinner-party wanted brightness. Mr. Montana spoke little, and was apparently content that people should look at him and ask each other why he did not speak. If he spoke little, he ate and drank less. He made it evident that he regarded the dinner as only a ceremonial for him. Mr. Aquitaine and Captain Marion talked a good deal; but Mr. Aquitaine often went into local affairs, and Captain Marion knew nothing about even the local affairs of the localities which ought to have been of personal concern to himself. Mrs. Trescoe was not near any one she cared to talk to. Melissa remained resolutely silent: Mrs. Aquitaine hardly ever talked.

Geraldine rose early next morning. She was an early riser even for Mr. Aquitaine's habits. She had lived for some years lately in an American town or village where it was an article of faith that no one ought to be out of bed much after nine o'clock in the evening, or in bed after five in the morning. She had fallen into the ways of the country with a flexibility natural to her fresh and vigorous nature. She was a girl of a quick and lively curiosity, and when she was at any new place was unresting until she had seen and learned all that was within her reach to know about it. This first morning, therefore, of her stay at Mr. Aquitaine's she rose very early. She had heard the murmuring of water in her ears all the night through, and she was in hopes, not

being quite clear as to the exact situation of her host's dwelling, that when she went to her window in the morning she might look upon the tossing sea. "Sing oh!" she kept murmuring to herself now and then at wakeful moments of the night; "let man learn liberty from crashing wind and lashing sea!" murmuring from the verses of a poet to whom English criticism has not yet done justice, and probably never will. When she woke in the morning and ran to her window she saw not the sea, indeed, but a sight surely not less lovely—a bright broad river flowing in the faint light of a breezy spring dawn. Not even the sea itself has had the love of poets, and of all natures that like the poet's are for ever fresh and young, as the rivers have had. The mother may, as Burns sings, forget the child, and the monarch forget the crown that has only been an hour upon his head; but who ever forgets the river of his youth? As Geraldine looked out upon the stream below her window, the river of her youth came back upon her memory; and with the river the thought of those who were happy with her by the ripple of its waters; of the father who was father, and friend, and companion alike: and there were tears in her eyes.

She was soon out upon the breezy lawn. Preparations were being made for Mr. Montana's going. His train was starting at an early hour, and Mr. Aquitaine was to accompany him to the

station. No other of the family or the guests was yet stirring. Geraldine saw Montana and Mr. Aquitaine on the lawn at a short distance from her. She was rather given to studying character, and of course, like most clever girls, fancied she had a distinct gift for the quick understanding of men and women. She had occupied herself a good deal in the voyage across the Atlantic in studying the characters of her companions, and she was of opinion that she had contrived to sound the depths of each nature except one. She was by no means clear about Mr. Montana. Sometimes he seemed to her merely vain and shallow; but at other times he impressed her with a certain sense of awe or dread, as if there were some hidden strength of dangerous will about him; and in other moods he seemed to her only a self-deluded visionary. On the whole, she did not like him—a rare condition of feeling with her: for her first and natural impulse was to like people. Most of us are otherwise constructed by nature: our first instinctive impulse is to dislike any new-comer, even though he be only a wayfarer getting into a railway-carriage, where he has all as good a right to be as we have. If he turns out a good fellow or an agreeable person after, we may like him well enough; but we leave the burden of self-vindication to him. It is enough for us that he is getting into the carriage where we are already seated, and although there be ample

room for him and us, our impulse is to dislike him all the same. Now, Miss Rowan's first impulse would have been to like him, and think that he ought to be made welcome.

She went up to Mr. Aquitaine at once and received his wondering congratulations upon her early rising.

"My daughter won't think of getting up these four or five hours yet. I am going to see Mr. Montana off by his train."

"May I go too?" Geraldine asked, delighted at the prospect of the drive, and the railway-station, and the sight new to her. She had no more hesitation about offering herself as Mr. Aquitaine's companion than if she had been tendering her companionship to Mr. Aquitaine's wife.

He looked for a moment a little surprised, but Geraldine did not notice his surprise, and he answered at once that he should be delighted to take her with him, and show her some of the town as they passed along, and bring her back before most of the other people in the house had got out of bed.

Mr. Montana had remained silent all the time. He was looking on the river. He had not spoken a word to Geraldine.

"Strange," he said suddenly, turning to Mr. Aquitaine, "how certain scenes impress one with the conviction that he must have seen them before. I don't suppose I ever could have been just

here before; and yet the look of the river makes me feel as if I had known the place once. I seem to have been young here."

"Oh, I felt exactly like that this morning," Geraldine said in quick sympathy with him, for once, as she thought. "When I looked out first and saw that lovely river flowing so fast, I felt as if I were living all my youth over again."

"All her youth?" Mr. Aquitaine said with a smile. "Is it then all gone?"

"It seems to me all gone," Geraldine said, "sometimes. It seemed so when I looked out this morning and saw the river."

Mr. Aquitaine turned to her with kindly sympathising eyes. He thought he could understand her feelings.

Montana had not been following all this.

"Was there not," he asked slowly of Aquitaine, "a park, a sort of public park, here once? somewhere on the river—as if it were here? I must have seen something of the kind when a child somewhere. Perhaps it was some other river like this."

"Why, to be sure we had a public park—a little park here on this very ground; but it is some years ago. Your feet are on what was its soil just now."

Montana started and looked down at the ground as if he expected to see some of the soil strangely clinging to his feet and in some mysterious way bearing testimony against him.

Mr. Aquitaine was launched into a little local

history of the growth of the town, the disproportionate size of the former park and the necessity of starting a new one, the important part he had himself borne in that work of improvement, and the strong opposition which had been got up, and the misconstruction to which the efforts of himself and others had been subjected by their enemies. Even the most liberal-minded residents of the greatest provincial town can seldom bring themselves to believe that local improvements and the local controversies that rage around the march of their progress are not of world-wide interest, or at least capable of being made so when expounded by some qualified lecturer.

Geraldne listened with such intense interest and beaming eyes that after a while Mr. Aquitaine accepted her as his audience and imparted all the knowledge to her. Mr. Montana was apparently not paying attention. In an undefinable sort of way he always put himself, from the first, in the position of one who is not bound to engage in any question with which he does not feel to be part of his own special mission. He had deeper thought, and must not be distracted from them; at least, must not be expected to endure the distraction long. He assumed this privilege; and, as he assumed it, the people he met gave it to him without struggle or protest.

"Time is getting on," Mr. Aquitaine suddenly said, looking at his watch; "I have to give one

or two directions; I'll come to you when it is time to go."

He went towards the house and left Montana and Miss Rowan on the lawn by the river. Geraldine hardly ever knew what it was to feel shy or embarrassed in the presence of any one. She had self-consciousness or self-conceit enough to be shy or nervous. But she did always find a certain sense of embarrassment in the company of Mr. Montana whenever they chanced to be for a moment alone. He had walked with her on deck now and then, in the "soft hours that fill the eyes and melt the heart," or while the steely light of the stars was on the pallid tips of the waves, and the ruddy orange glow from the stern windows sent that gleam over the sea which Coleridge finely compared to the light of experience illumining only that which it leaves behind. He had never attempted anything like flirtation with her; his manner was not that of a man who cared to waste his time in flirting with women; but there was a grave familiarity about him which was, she thought, addressed more distinctly to her than to others, and which displeased her. It was a manner of authority, as to one who had known her long and had a right to direct her. It was not easy to explain what there was in it which seemed to imply a sort of special companionship, a common bond, a tie like that between master and pupil, guardian and ward; but something there was in

Mr. Montana's manner to her from the first which impressed her with the idea of such an assumption. There was nothing to resent; nothing that she could clearly describe even to a sister, if she had one; but the impression was on her, and it made her feel a little constrained in Mr. Montana's company.

It might have seemed as if he were resolved to deepen the impression now: for the moment Mr. Aquitaine had gone, he struck at once into dialogue with Geraldine, to whom he had not addressed a word before.

"Who was the young man who sat next you at dinner last night, and talked to you a great deal?"

"He is a Mr. Fanshawe," Geraldine answered. "I think I shall go in, Mr. Montana."

"Just a moment, and I will go with you. Do you know anything of Mr. Fanshawe?"

"Nothing; I am quite a stranger here; I never met any of the people before."

"You seemed to be interested in him?"

"Yes; I was very much interested in him. He seemed very clever and bright, and he made himself very agreeable."

"Do you know where he comes from?"

"He told me he lives in London; but that he belongs to this place. But, indeed, I know hardly anything about him. Mr. Aquitaine could tell you."

"Shall we go in?" he said.

Geraldine turned her back to the river, and they walked slowly towards the house. Suddenly Mr. Montana stopped and said,

"We shall meet again in London, of course; but I want you before that to think over what I have said to you. You are bound to help us. We want you."

"Why I more than another? What can I do for you—or for anything? I have no power——"

"You have power."

"Have I? What is it?"

"You have the power of impressing men and women. If you had faith you would find it easy to fill others with the same faith. That is your calling in life. You cannot evade it. Mind, I tell you that. You will remember it afterwards. It is your calling; you cannot evade it."

"But, Mr. Montana," Geraldine said impatiently, "do pray tell me the plain meaning of all this. Has it any meaning? I don't even know what your objects are. I don't know anything about them. Am I to have faith in projects before I even know what they are? What am I to have faith in?"

"You must have faith in me, to begin with; I have faith in you."

Miss Rowan looked curiously at him. She was not afraid of his dark burning eyes. She looked steadily into his eyes, and she could find

no meaning there; no faith; no purpose. They seemed shallow and cold, for all their brilliancy.

"I can't have faith in you until I know something more of you," she said, with a directness which had nothing rude in it, so frankly and simply was her answer given as a mere statement of fact. "But even if I had all the faith in the world, what would be the good of that? I don't even know what mountain you want to move."

"I have fixed on you," he said slowly, "from the first."

"From what first, Mr. Montana? We met for the first time a fortnight ago; I hardly call it even an acquaintance."

"Do you remember 'the Ancient Mariner?'" He says he knows at once the man that must hear him; 'to him my tale I tell.' Well, I know the woman who must hear me; to her my tale I tell."

"But, Mr. Montana, you have not told me any tale," Geraldine said, and then could have bitten her tongue for saying anything so unlucky. It seemed an invitation to him to go on and make her his confidante. Montana accepted it as such, evidently.

"You shall be told," he answered. "I don't ask you to say any more now. I shall enlist you in my cause; have no doubt of that. I want such help as yours, and I have a right to claim it."

Mr. Aquitaine appeared at the door and beckoned to them.

"I shan't go, Mr. Aquitaine," Geraldine said. "I should only delay you; I have things to put on, and all that."

"We have time enough, as far as that goes," Mr. Aquitaine said. "Do you think I didn't make allowance for the putting-on of things? Have I not experience? Is there not Melissa? Go; run along and put your things on; we shall have time."

"No, thanks; I think I have changed my mind. I should rather not go."

"Really rather not? Really and truly?"

"Really and truly."

"Well, I know ladies hate to be hurried." Mr. Aquitaine perhaps on the whole was relieved to find that they had not to wait. "Then, Mr. Montana, we'll get along. Ten minutes too early, you know, better than half-a-minute too late."

They went away. Montana shook hands with Geraldine, but did not say a word. He seemed to have made up his mind that she should be impressed with the difference of his manner to her when they were alone, and when any other was present. It did impress her—uncomfortably. She felt like one who is being quietly, gradually entangled in some conspiracy. Montana had already got so far as to draw from her a seeming acknowledgment of her willingness to accept his confidence; and yet it would have been ridiculous,

even if it were possible, for her at that moment to enter any sort of protest against such an assumption. She walked slowly to the edge of the river again, feeling strangely dissatisfied with herself. The stream lost, for the moment, all its charm.

Geraldine was not the only very early riser among the women of the house that morning. Melissa Aquitaine had passed an uneasy night alternating between long stretches of sleeplessness, and dreams that were more unrefreshing and disquieting than even lack of sleep. She knew that Mr. Montana was leaving the house early, and she got out of bed with the dawn, and, wrapping herself in masses of covering, sat at her window. It looked upon the lawn. She had not sat there long when she saw Montana and Geraldine walking together slowly, and side by side, towards the house. They seemed deep in confidential talk. She saw them stop suddenly, as if there was some confidence they had yet to exchange before they passed indoors. Then they disappeared from her sight. She could not see from her window that her father was now on the threshold speaking with them. All she saw was that Montana and Geraldine were at that immature hour walking together side by side in seemingly confidential talk. Then, after a moment or two had passed away, she saw Geraldine come out alone, and slowly cross the lawn with the manner of one who is

depressed. It would have suited well enough with the manner of a girl whose lover has just parted from her. A pang went through Melissa's heart. She hated Geraldine from that moment. She was possessed by such a vehemence of anger and bitterness of spirit that she allowed some of her wrappings to fall off her shoulders unheeded. She did not even mind the cold at such a moment; she did not care even though she was uncomfortable.

CHAPTER V.

GERALDINE.

MANY a sentimental and enamoured youth, who happened to be in converse with Miss Rowan, was struck to the heart with the deep, peculiar, dreamy gaze of her soft brown eyes. There were moments when they looked on him, through him, into his very soul; and yet their meaning seemed far away, rapt from earthly things. Her soul, he sometimes thought despondently, was with the stars, and not with earth and him. He could not doubt that the eyes turned kindly towards him, and rested on his eyes with unutterable softness; and still there seemed something distant, withdrawn, suppressed, in Miss Rowan's expression. Sometimes the enamoured youth became filled with a

faint hope that he was making an impression which Miss Rowan did not wish wholly to resist, and yet would not acknowledge even to herself. Even from across a table sometimes a man found those eyes resting on him quietly, softly, giving no response to his own, like the eyes of one who, waking, but hardly conscious, dreamed of him.

The explanation is simple, and not poetic. Miss Rowan was short-sighted. When she particularly wanted to see some distant object clearly, she put up her double eye-glass as unaffectedly as if she had been born and bred in Boston, Massachusetts; but when she did not particularly want to study the object, it often happened that her eyes seemed to rest where her mind certainly was not; and she did not know that other eyes were looking into hers. Thus it happened that some persons gave her credit for a poetic dreaminess in which she did not indulge; and many women accused her of being a frank coquette, and making audacious work of her eyes.

The presence of Miss Geraldine Rowan always set people talking about her. She was not by any means an astonishingly beautiful young woman. But she had a very charming face, with brown hair and deep Celtic eyes. She was quick and graceful in all her movements. She had seen different kinds of life; had had some suffering and some happiness, and had learned the art of ex-

tracting such enjoyment as might be out of any slight and chance material that was flung in her way. Her Irish birth had given her vivacity and animal spirits, along with that suffusion of the poetic which seems the inheritance of the Celtic race everywhere; and her American life had taught her the ways of a freedom which in the old world is not the endowment of an unmarried woman. She was decidedly a clever girl; but if she ever seemed anything of a prodigy, it could only be for the simple reason that she could do many different things well, even if she did nothing surpassingly well. She could sing; she could play the piano and the harp—the almost forgotten harp, once the pride of every true heroine, now associated in the minds of most Londoners, at all events, with green baize and the outside of a public-house. She could ride, drive, swim, and skate, as well as dance. She was not afraid of anything. She was fond of reading, and spoke two or three modern languages very well. Each of these accomplishments is in itself commonplace enough; even a combination of several of them would not go far towards making a feminine Crichton. But combine them all, and a few others in the person of a graceful girl with a generous heart and a fresh, vivid nature, and it is easy to understand why young women and elderly gentlemen, as well as young men, should have agreed to exaggerate her gifts and graces into those of

a paragon. Her kindly heart and sunny temper did a good deal to make people tolerant of her cleverness. She had not the least taint of the coquette in her nature. She looked straight into the eyes of every one with whom she spoke, and spoke out so frankly and directly whatever she wished to say, that it seemed hardly possible to venture on paying her any of the stereotyped compliments of society. Nature might have made her to be a special blessing to shy young men, or reserved and taciturn elders. He of either sort who most dreaded to be thrown upon the tender mercies of a girl, felt not the least embarrassment in the company of Miss Rowan. Even if he were actually left alone with her, he felt no fear about breaking down and finding that he had nothing to say. She was sure to find enough to say, and to draw him out on some subject which specially interested him. Shy Mr. Trescoe found himself, after a while, chatting freely with Geraldine Rowan. He even found himself starting a conversation with her, and asking her questions quite of his own motion. Once he was heard, in the face of a breakfast-room full of company, to invite her to take a turn with him in the garden. His wife was intensely amused, and complimented Geraldine on the success which she had accomplished in making Mr. Trescoe talk to a girl without blushing.

The company were at luncheon, and were talking of the departed guest.

"I do like him so much—so much," Mrs. Aquitaine said, in her languid way and her imperfect English. "He is so beautiful; the most beautiful man I have seen in all England. He is like a picture of the night with his great eyes."

"Splendid fellow—I know it," Captain Marion said. "I talked a great deal with him all the way across, and he let me see most of his plans. He inspires me with confidence."

"I couldn't understand his plans, all the same," Mr. Trescoe ventured to interpose.

"Dear Frank," his wife observed, "there is nothing very surprising in that. Who expected you to understand them? You don't go in much for understanding things, do you, dear?"

"Well, I don't know," Trescoe answered in perfect good-humour; "I don't set up to be very clever, Kitty, that's true enough; but I can see just as far into a millstone as my neighbour, I fancy, and I know I couldn't make out what Montana was explaining to your papa all the way over. In fact, I don't think he was explaining anything; I think he was only dodging, don't you know," he said, addressing himself to Mr. Aquitaine; "trying to seem as if he was explaining things, do you see, and not explaining them, all the same. So he struck me——"

"Struck you?" said Katherine, "struck my husband! But didn't you hit him again, Frank? I would if I were you."

Katherine's mild joke made them laugh; but it did not succeed, as she had perhaps hoped it would, in turning the conversation away from Montana.

"Nonsense—he is full of frankness," Captain Marion said. "I thought he seemed only anxious to find people with sympathy to listen to him."

"Then you understand what he is going to do in Europe?" Mr. Aquitaine asked.

"Yes, certainly; that is, I understand his general objects. I know what he would wish to do, if he could."

"Well, what does he wish to do?"

"He wants to arouse the sympathies of people here in a great scheme for the good of humanity. Of course he didn't fully go into the details of his scheme, but he will explain all that in London. He does not want it to get about before he has an opportunity of explaining it fully himself. He thinks premature and imperfect criticism would have a prejudicial effect; and of course it would. We all know that."

"Then you really don't know anything about his plans?"

"About his actual plans, no; but about his purpose I do. His purposes seem to be entirely noble."

"I think Frank wasn't so far wrong, after all," Mr. Aquitaine quietly observed.

"I am so glad to hear it," Katherine said. "Frank is so far wrong generally."

"Come now, I wasn't so far wrong once, at all events," the unruffled Frank observed.

"When was that, dear?" his wife asked with affected simplicity.

"When I asked you to marry me, Kitty."

"It was I was out of it there," said Kitty.

"But about this Montana," Aquitaine returned to the subject—"I don't like him somehow. He seems all too theatric. He is like a play-actor; he is acting always. His manner, his looks, his gestures, everything about him—acting, acting all."

"I don't think he is acting," Geraldine said emphatically, and speaking for the first time.

"Nor I," said Mr. Fanshawe.

Melissa had not opened her mouth on the subject. It was rare for that usually irrepressible little talker not to have a word to say on any question, whether she knew anything about it or not. But she had remained silent, looking up now and then from speaker to speaker, and then dropping her eyes at once. She now glanced eagerly at Miss Rowan, and her dark complexion glowed with scarcely suppressed anger, as Geraldine seemed to be coming out in defence of Mr. Montana. But her eyes flashed gratitude on Fanshawe although he was apparently following Geraldine's lead.

"I don't believe he is acting," Miss Rowan

went on. "I believe the man is self-deceived as well as deceiving. But I believe he is deceiving all the same; I think he is in love with his own ideas, or schemes, or whatever they are. I think he is in love with himself."

"If I were he, I think I should rather have been in love with Miss Rowan," Melissa said, looking saucily up with a suggestion of venom on her tremulous lips. "He might have had opportunity enough on the voyage, one would think, and since perhaps."

"Mel, my little girl, you give your tongue too much licence," her father said quietly.

"Little girls ought to be seen and not heard, I suppose," his unabashed daughter replied. "Thank you, papa; I intend to be seen as well as heard, I can assure you, and to see, too. One can see a good deal if one gets up early."

Geraldine only smiled good-humouredly.

"He had opportunity enough," she said; "but I can assure you he was not in love with me or any other girl; he was all absorbed in himself. He would hardly have been much in love with me, for I could not hide my distrust of him. I think I disliked him instinctively."

Melissa smiled scornfully. She did not believe Geraldine.

"But those instinctive dislikes," Miss Marion said—she, too, had been silent thus far; "are they reasonable, Miss Rowan? Are they not too fe-

minine, don't you think? Are they not what men say all women are given to—likes or dislikes that we can't explain? I should have thought you would not encourage such feelings. It hardly seems quite Christianlike, does it?"

"It doesn't," Geraldine admitted. "I am afraid I am a very bad Christian sometimes. I admit it is downright feminine, womanish, foolish, anything you like; but still I do feel it. And then, may there not be some warning sometimes in those undefined antipathies? We don't know quite all of nature's secrets yet, do we? But I won't try to excuse myself by inventing mysterious natural laws; I'll take all the blame of my antipathies. I can't help distrusting Mr. Montana; I don't like him."

"I don't like him," Fanshawe said earnestly. "I agree with every word Miss Rowan says."

Sydney Marion looked up sadly, but not surprised of course; she knew how it would be. He was already becoming the bonds slave of Geraldine Rowan.

"I don't think he is acting," Fanshawe continued, volubly; "at least, I don't think he is all acting. I dare say he is half fanatic, half impostor. I dare say he believes in himself; a fellow may succeed in deceiving himself more thoroughly than he deceives any one else."

"You young men are dreadful," Katherine said. "You are all the same, just the same. It

is enough to hear two or three women say that any man is handsome, and you all hate him from that moment. Talk of the jealousy of women! It's nothing to the jealousy of men—young men, I mean," she added, suddenly remembering that Captain Marion admitted all the merits of Mr. Montana.

"I don't think women are jealous of each other at all," Sydney Marion said, in a tone of gentle and almost regretful conviction.

"Not a bit," Katherine affirmed; "why should they be? As long as another woman doesn't come in one's way, I am sure we don't care how handsome she is, or how much she is admired."

"I am not jealous of handsome women," Melissa said, "but I hate them all." She delivered this gentle sentiment with her eyes fixed on Miss Rowan.

"Fie, then, my Melissa," Mrs. Aquitaine gently interposed; "I am sure you do not hate Miss Rowan."

"I didn't say I hated Miss Rowan," Melissa replied demurely.

It was not well to try to put this young lady in the right. She was like a child whom it is unwise to tempt with any questions, as something embarrassing to the general company is likely to be the result. Melissa sadly embarrassed and annoyed most of the listeners. Geraldine did not in the slightest degree mind the saucy little maiden's

attack, and only rushed to the relief of the general company, and especially of Melissa herself, fearing lest Mr. Aquitaine might feel himself called upon to administer some public and futile rebuke to his unmanageable daughter.

"Still, a man may be too handsome," she said. "Mr. Montana seems to me much too handsome. He is naturally absorbed in admiring himself and seeing what an impression he makes. I don't believe a man could be a hero who was so handsome as that. It is not the business of a man to be handsome. Perhaps it is only because of that idea that I have felt a sort of distrust of Mr. Montana; I don't know any real reason for not liking him, and Miss Marion is right. One ought not to speak as if a mere feeling of one's own were a reason. I ought not to have said anything against Mr. Montana. May I withdraw it all? Is it too late?"

"Much too late," said Fanshawe. "I stand by it all."

Mr. Montana had not been four-and-twenty hours in Mr. Aquitaine's house, and he had already succeeded in converting all the inmates of the building, permanent and temporary, into divided camps. An atmosphere of something like discomfort was making itself felt. All the women admired Montana except Geraldine alone and Mrs. Trescoe hated her for not admiring him; while Melissa, who would have hated her if she had

praised him, hated her now for pretending or daring to dispraise him. Sydney Marion was sorry for Geraldine's evident yielding to mere prejudice and feminine instincts. She too admired Montana; but her mind was distracted from entire absorption in that controversy by her sad misgivings on the subject of young Fanshawe's evident admiration for Miss Rowan. Geraldine was doubly an offender. All the men in the place admired her, and she would not admire the one man whom all the women agreed in admiring. Mr. Aquitaine was distressed by the ways of his daughter. Not merely did she persist in showing an open dislike to Miss Rowan, but she seemed unhappy on her own account as well. She crept into corners and remained silent there as long as she could, and even when drawn out of her retreats she did not enter with any spirit into conversation or amusement of any kind that was going on. Katherine was restless and fretful; now full of high spirits, and now out of humour and disposed to quarrel. Mrs. Aquitaine remained just as usual; almost absolutely without interest in anything that was going on.

Geraldine's high spirits and unfailing temper stood her now in good stead. She knew the kindly purpose of Mr. Aquitaine and his wife, and did not mind in the least Melissa's little outbursts of anger. That is to say, she did not feel angry with the spoiled child; but, on the contrary, she made up her mind to go roundly to work and

make a friend of the girl. In any case, she considered herself as the guest of her father's dear old friend Captain Marion, and held it her first duty to take care that, so far as she was concerned, nothing should occur to make him feel uncomfortable. So she set herself to work to amuse the company as well as she might, and to charm them out of the curious English way which objects to being amused. She sang and played whenever anybody asked her; she suggested all manner of ways of passing the time; she talked to Mrs. Aquitaine just as long as the languid lady seemed to be amused by the talk, and stopped off at the right time. She asked a great many questions of Mr. Aquitaine, and gave full satisfaction to his desire for imparting information. He thought her not so practical a girl as Sydney Marion, but very much more interesting. He drove her out early in the morning once or twice, before most of the other guests had thought of getting up, and found he had a very delightful time of it. Geraldine had acquired all the free and fearless ways of the American girl, although she was not American either by birth or family, and she thought no more of going out in the morning with Mr. Aquitaine than she would of going out with Captain Marion, or with her own father if he were living. But it is to be feared that the other ladies did not altogether admire her behaviour in this respect. They could not say that

she was bold; even Katherine could not say so much as that. But they thought she might have remained in bed in the mornings until the other ladies found it convenient to get up.

Geraldine went her way all unconscious of the talk she was creating. As for Captain Marion, her manner to him was so affectionate that even languid Mrs. Aquitaine sometimes smiled with a half-knowing look at Sydney. Captain Marion was acknowledged by every one to be a delightful companion. He had narrowly missed being a man of talent—a certain want of force of character or of concentration had caused him to fall short of a genuine success in everything he did and everything he attempted. He had been admired in the army, but had had no chance of distinguishing himself particularly. He was a clever amateur artist; some of his smaller water-colours had been in the Academy. He could play the violin, and was a good musician in general. He loved books and was a connoisseur in bindings. He was a student of science in an easy way, and could do a little etching. He was young in appearance and in manner; younger still in heart. His talk was bright and even joyous, with just enough of sympathetic tenderness to give the idea of a certain depth of character which, perhaps, when one came to explore, was not found to exist. He was still a man with whom it was at least possible to imagine a young woman falling in love—even so

charming a young woman as Geraldine Rowan. "Eh, Sydney, my dear, I think you will have a young mamma-in-law—I mean a step-mamma, one of these days," Mrs. Aquitaine said to Miss Marion.

CHAPTER VI.

THE XANADU OF THE FUTURE.

THERE was a great assembly in a large London hall about a month after the landing of Captain Marion and his companions in the northern seaport. The hall was crowded; all the more so, because the manner of getting the company together had been peculiar. There was no buying of tickets, or payment of money at the doors. The company assembled by invitation. Each person had a card printed specially, and bearing his or her own name; not a name written in and filling up a space left blank for the purpose, but a separate name engraved on each card—one card specially printed for each person. Each card also contained the announcement that no other invitations whatever would be issued, nor would any notice be taken of any request, public or private, for additional admissions. The invited company included representatives of every rank, profession, and occupation. The peerage, the House of Com-

mons, the world of fashion, the Church in all its denominations, the bench, the bar, the army, science, literature, art—all were addressed through some eminent name. The manner of distribution was perplexingly odd. Sometimes a wife was invited, and not her husband. Sometimes, out of a stately and noble household, only a girl of twenty was asked to favour the meeting with her presence; it could only be assumed that she had, at one time or another, expressed some faith or hope not common to her family, and which showed her to be in communion with the higher aspirations of humanity. Representative working men of all trades and shades of opinion found themselves bidden to this remarkable gathering; and, when they got there, were amazed to see themselves planted next to some great statesman or brilliant leader of fashion. The leaders of fashion were caught readily enough by the peculiarities of the whole affair. The London season so far had been rather dull and lustreless. No Oriental sovereign of any colour was in town just then. No sensation of any kind had stirred the languid atmosphere until Montana made his appearance. His happy inspiration as to the form of invitation was a complete success. At first people wondered; then laughed; then thought they did not care to go; then found that others were going, and that others again were dying to go and could not get invitations; and thereupon, of course, all those who had

invitations became determined to use the privilege. No cause, however great or good, could have had, to start with, anything like the impulse which was given to Montana's mission by his specially devised plan of invitation. He had managed the whole affair so cleverly; had contrived so ingeniously to transfix with his invitations some of the leading persons in every class, profession, and movement, that not to have received one of his cards was a proof that the unfavoured creature was nobody, even in his own particular sphere. It is much to be feared that some white lies came from pretty lips concerning those invitations, and that ladies described themselves as having been invited, but resolved not to go, to whose door no messenger had brought Montana's card.

The name of Montana was not the least of the peculiarities which contributed to his sudden success. He had got at the name in a very simple way. He had made the beginning of his career in the territory of Montana, in the United States; and, wanting a name, he had adopted for himself the name of the region in which he made a beginning. But had he had a special inspiration on the subject, he could not have done a better thing for his London success than to call himself Montana. It struck the attention at once. It did the part of a flourish of trumpets. When "Mr. Montana" was announced, the company must look up in some expectancy and curiosity. Not one in

every thousand of ordinary London people knew that there was a place in the United States called Montana. Most persons, therefore, assumed that there was something Italian, or Spanish, or romantic somehow, in such a name. Even if the bearer of the name had proved to be a short, stout, and commonplace man, with reddish whiskers and redder cheeks, it would still have counted for something that he had such a remarkable name. But when the proclamation of Mr. Montana's name in a London crowd was followed by the apparition of Mr. Montana himself, the effect was something almost startling. Montana was singularly handsome. He wore no beard or moustache; and yet—rare thing with shaven men of dark complexion—his chin and upper-lip showed none whatever of that blue-black, gunpowder-stained, tattooed appearance which suggests that the razor is always wanting. He looked over the heads of ordinary men, and of all women. His pale, melancholy face, and his deeply brilliant eyes, seemed to look only into vacancy. He was habitually silent. He hardly ever spoke until he was spoken to; he would stand in a crowded drawing-room or sit at a dinner-table for any length of time without uttering a word, and yet he had not in the slightest degree the manner of a shy or even a reserved man. He seemed wrapped up in the quietness of an absolute self-reliance and independence. But when spoken to, even on the most commonplace

subject, he had a way of suddenly turning the light of his oppressively bright eyes on the person who addressed him in a way that seemed to ask, "Why talk commonplace to me? You and I are made for better discourse." His mere way of saying the four little words, "Do *you* think so?" made many a susceptible woman think the time had come for her to review her course of life, and test its real worth. "Do *you* think so," the words seemed to imply; "you, whom, although I never saw you before, I know to be capable of loftier thoughts, of utterances that roll from soul to soul?" An audacious stripling from the House of Commons, strong on facts and figures, once at dinner boldly encountered, or, as he put it, "tackled," Montana on some opinion the latter had been expressing with regard to the future place of the United States among the nations. The youth of promise positively affirmed afterwards, and will maintain to his dying day, that Montana knew absolutely nothing about the subject on which he was laying down the law: that his dates, his statistics, his views as to all manner of facts only showed the most utter ignorance. He was, as he firmly believes, literally overwhelming Montana with confutation; he hoped to expose Montana then and there; he still insists that Montana had not one word to say in reply. Certain it is that Montana did not say one word in reply. But in the midst of the young law-maker's argument his

face was lighted by a smile so sweet, so kindly, so pitying, so apparently irrepressible, that the whole company became ashamed of their friend, and felt that he must be making himself outrageously ridiculous. Montana's smile appeared to be playing on his lips in spite of himself. It said in the most expressive manner: "I will not laugh; I will not. I must try to seem respectful. He is such an earnest little blockhead; but, good heavens what a blockhead he is." The host said something meant to be soothing to his poor young friend, and broke up the conversation. They joined the ladies. Not a word more was said publicly on the subject; but men whispered to each other that really young Symington had too much chatter, and was becoming insufferable, and they were very glad that Montana had put him down. Some of the listeners always remained convinced that Montana had somehow or other crushed him with argument, and that Symington had shown himself shockingly ignorant. Mr. Symington fumed and chafed in vain. The pitying smile had settled him in all men's eyes.

Montana spoke to him kindly afterwards when he was leaving the drawing-room. "I will tell you about that," he said, "some other time. It is a complicated subject, but you can be made to understand it. I like your earnestness; it is a good sign. The man who wants to learn will learn, be the difficulties what they may."

Symington's brain seemed to reel. He positively lost his coolness and his power of speech. He was literally shut up.

Our friends, or most of them, attended the great meeting. Captain Marion had settled in London for the time, in order to show Miss Rowan everything, and to give his daughter Sydney a long-postponed holiday. Mr. Aquitaine had brought Melissa up in order that she, too, might have her share of the holiday. He did not propose to make any stay himself; he would rush up and down after his usual fashion, leaving Melissa meanwhile in care of his friends. The whole party were in seats not far from the platform on which the orator was to take his stand. Melissa was biting her lips to keep down her impatience. She was longing for Montana to make his appearance. He had never spoken more than a few of the most formal words to her; had probably not bestowed a single thought on her, and she could think of nothing but him. Since the first moment when she saw him he had taken a strange possession of her soul, and the poor little girl could not relieve her mind by breathing one word of confidence to any human creature. Miss Rowan's fine face, graceful figure, and animated movements attracted much attention. People set her down as foreign until she put up her double eye-glass, and then they pronounced her American. "If I had such eyes," one lady remarked, "I would

rather never see anything than hide them under those horrid glasses." Captain Marion attracted some attention, partly because of his bright smile and his good figure, but partly, too, because he would persist in displaying himself in a velvet coat, which he loved to wear when lounging and working at home.

Montana came on the platform, and every one else was forgotten. The severe outlines of his evening dress made him look even taller and more slender than he really was. He hardly acknowledged the murmur of applause, but at once began to speak. He spoke in a low, sweet, measured tone. His accent was somewhat peculiar. It could not be called foreign, but it was not of London. Most people in the hall assumed that it must be American. Miss Marion whispered as much to Miss Rowan, but Miss Rowan shook her head and said it was not American.

"Irish, perhaps," Miss Marion suggested.

Miss Rowan smiled, and said there was nothing of the Irishman about Mr. Montana, she was glad to think.

"How unjust she is!" Miss Marion sadly thought. "She hates him. Strange that so noble-minded a girl should be so prejudiced."

"Our friend is a north-country man," Mr. Aquitaine said quietly to Captain Marion; "Lancashire or Yorkshire clearly; I didn't notice it in talking with him; but it comes out now."

Montana spoke with deep feeling apparently, and with a kind of eloquence. He sometimes warmed into a glowing thought; sometimes even condescended to some quaint piece of humorous illustration. He held his audience from first to last. The whole discourse was entirely out of the common. It had nothing to do with the ordinary gabble of the platform. It had no conventional eloquence about it. There was no studied antithesis; the listener could not anticipate in the middle of a sentence the stock form of rhetoric with which it was to close. The wonderful eyes seemed to be everywhere. If by chance any of the audience became for a moment inattentive, he or she suddenly seemed to feel an uncomfortable sensation, and looking up found that Montana's eyes were fixed on the disloyal listener. A curious thing was that almost every one in the room seemed to feel the direct appeal of Montana's eyes.

The speech was an explanation of Mr. Montana's mission. Of course he had more than one mission. His life was understood to be devoted to missions of one kind or another. But the special object of his visit to Europe just now was to found a great colony in the United States, where men and women might seek and find the perfect life. The colony was to be made up of as many different nationalities as Mr. Montana could contrive to inspire with his own reforming

energy and faith. From the marriages contracted within the limits of the new colony were to spring the future governing race, by whom the good life of earth's children was to be made perfect. The Englishman was to bring his solid energy and his all-conquering patience; Ireland was to give her poetic fancy and the purity of her nature; the Italian would contribute his artistic genius; the Scot his indomitable strength of will; the German his vast capacity for the acquirement of knowledge; the Frenchman his lively genius and brisk spirit of recuperation. America, of course, opening her bosom to these seekers after perfection, would contribute her ample share to the work of colonisation. The colony would be self-governing; it would be founded on principles opposed to the base and worldly selfishness that had made property exclusive. It was to have its foundation deep down among the heroic virtues. Other communities had lived by appealing to man's least noble qualities; now, at last, a practical appeal should be made to the better angel that dwelt within him. The war spirit could not thrive among a community which enclosed in loving bonds the representatives of so many races hitherto hostile. Temperance, self-abnegation, and the family virtues were to be the inspiration of this new enterprise. Other projects of the same kind had tried to supplant the family virtues by socialistic innovations and extravagances, and had

perished of their own pride and their own sins. The New Atlantis was to be a community on which all good men and women must smile benignant approval. Around that purified and almost sacred commonwealth would grow up in time a great race of heroic, self-denying, happy men and women, governing their lives on the laws of physical health, those embodied illustrations of the moral law. Thus, with the ages, the hopes and energies of the race would centre in the New World, which had this still newer world, an empire within an empire, enclosed within its vast domain. There would be room enough through many ages for America to take in the pilgrims and refugees of all parts of the ancient earth; and Montana saw, with poetic or prophetic eye, a time in the dim future when Europe and Asia should be only the great holiday grounds, the vast museums and art-galleries, covered and uncovered, amid which the colonists of the new settlements might seek temporary recreation, might study the half-forgotten arts of an aged time, and coming here and there on the ruins of a prison, the wreck of a fortress, might "wonder what old world such things could see."

All that was wanted for the beginning was land, money, and colonists. Mr. Montana announced that the land could be got easily enough; got for the asking from the generous American Government. Money was largely needed. Mr.

Montana explained that this new colony was to be no ramshackle concern of log huts and shanties, and uncouth makeshift ways. The New Atlantis was to begin as it proposed to go on, in dignity and stateliness. It was an enterprise, Montana emphatically declared, of a thousand-fold more importance to the world and to history than the founding of Rome; and it should begin in form not unworthy its glorious destiny. The city was to have gates of bronze, columns of granite, marble halls of science and art, cathedrals rivalling in majestic beauty and devotional suggestiveness the most venerable piles of the ancient world. Every architecture was to be represented there, and who could doubt that, as time rolled on, the commonwealth would develop an architecture of its own, the compound of the world's ideas informed by the new spirit, and destined to be the last word of the architecture of the human race? The sanitary laws were to govern all the conditions of the city. The streets were to be broad indeed, but not straight and monotonous. On the contrary, the greatest diversity of size and structure was to relieve the eyes and delight the senses everywhere. Two rivers watered the base of the gentle hill on which this city of the future was to stand. The bridges over those streams alone would be like the embodied dream of a poet. To look to heaven from such a bridge and to see the stars reflected in the water below, or the sunbeams

glancing on its ripples, would lift up the soul of the gazer almost as much as to bend in the cathedral and hear the organ peal forth its anthem of piety and praise. In the purified atmosphere ignoble thoughts could no more live than man's gross lungs can breathe the upper ether.

Most of the eyes that met Montana's, as he expounded his plans, were turned up with interest, admiration, and a certain amount of awe. But it must be owned that a good many pairs of sceptical or scornful eyes looked up from above moustaches and beards, and glanced through scholarly or professional spectacles. The men, on the whole, were not so much taken as the ladies. Most of the younger men admitted that he was "awfully clever," but some thought him a decided humbug; some opined that he really didn't know himself what he was talking about. Some denied that he was at all handsome or even good-looking; and by the very energy of their protests bore testimony to the effect his personal appearance must have produced. Most of the elders held the scheme to be wholly impracticable, and whispered that the moment you came to look into the thing and get the facts and figures of it, everybody would see it could not come to anything. These were the worldlings, however, the mere practical narrow-minded men of economics and statistics; and Montana had in his speech already taken order with them by expressly announcing, in tone of

melancholy contempt, that wherever he went the narrow-minded and practical, the wise in their own conceit, were sure to be against him. He carried with him three classes of persons almost entirely: the earnest men and women who had views of life; the merely emotional, with whom a striking face and a strange manner are impressive; and the idle, at least among women, who were glad to be stirred by a new sensation on any terms. Many a woman's heart beat with strange pulsation as she gazed into that dark bloodless face, and fancied those eyes were turned on her.

"And now," said Montana, drawing a deep breath and flooding the audience with the light of his eyes, "we want money for this great work. I have come to Europe for help; and I will go from one end of Europe to the other in quest of it. Let any one who hears me and wishes to give, give as may seem proportioned to his means. Let the wealthy give of their wealth, but in Heaven's name let me have the working-man's penny and the sempstress's halfpenny. One thing you are to know: I will have no unwilling gifts. Before I have done with Europe I shall be loaded with money—let no one presume to encumber me with his gift who doubts my enterprise. I will give no acknowledgment or receipt of any kind; I will take no gift which has a name appended to it. If any lady or gentleman thinks of sending a contribution in his own name or her own name,

it is useless. I will send all such offerings instantly back. There is nothing to be gained personally by contributing to my enterprise; no, not even a line of acknowledgment in a newspaper; not the poor credit of being anywhere mentioned or known as a donor. At each of the principal entrances of this hall there is an urn covered by a cloth. Let each who pleases raise the cloth in passing, and deposit any offering he feels called upon to make. Then let him cover the gift so that none can see it, and go his way. I entreat of him, if he does not give with his whole heart and soul, to keep his money; not to stain our noble enterprise with the soil of his unwilling gift. Whether the money is found here or elsewhere is all the same to me and to the cause. It will come; I only ask that it may come with a will."

The effect of this appeal was instantaneous. Almost everybody gave. Some white-haired old gentlemen took out their purses, carefully ascertained that they kept back enough to pay for a cab home, and threw the remainder of the contents into the urn. Some ladies, not a few, simply dropped their purses in, and hurried on. As Melissa Aquitaine came to one of the urns, she drew purposely behind her party. She had not a purse—hardly ever carried such an article about her. She glanced confusedly and timidly around to see if any one was looking, and then stripped off her bracelets, her rings, her brooch, her watch and

chain, and dropped them in a glittering clinking heap into the urn. Her action was not unseen. A lady coming up had noticed it; she, too, threw her bracelets, bangles, and chains into the urn. Some men stole their contribution into the place of deposit as if they were ashamed of showing any faith in the business, and yet could not help giving to it.

Miss Marion and Miss Rowan came on together. Sydney took out her little purse, and found she had only a very few shillings.

"Will you lend me some?" she said timidly to Miss Rowan, who had seen her action, and was looking at her with a sort of amused pity.

"No, indeed I won't," Miss Rowan said decidedly, "not for that thing. I'll not help you to set such folly going. But listen," she said, suddenly changing her tone, "did not Mr. Montana say that the gifts of the unbelieving would only bring discredit on the cause — a curse and not a blessing; didn't he?"

"He did, I think," Miss Marion answered faintly.

"Very well; then in that hope I make myself one of his contributors; and I give with a good will."

She tossed her purse contemptuously into the urn.

They came against Mrs. Fanshawe.

"We are going in to see him," Katherine said with sparkling eyes; "I sent Frank to tell him, and Frank says he will see us—in the reception-room, you know. He is seeing some people there; women mostly; howling swells, I suppose; duchesses and all that; but he'll see us. Isn't that sweet of him? Isn't he delightful? Doesn't he make one feel so good, and pure, and noble, and all that sort of thing? Doesn't he? The world all seems so poor and unreal. I have given something; haven't you? and I am going to send him some more. Won't you send him some more? But not in our own names; he wouldn't have that. Oh! it's all glorious, I think."

Young Mr. Fanshawe came up.

"I think it's all a confounded imposture," he said, without waiting for any one to solicit his opinion. "He's a clever fellow enough, but he's a humbug. Don't you think so, Miss Rowan?"

Already, poor Sydney Marion thought, he has learned to appeal only to her.

"I don't believe in him," Geraldine said with her accustomed energy; "I don't believe anything good will come of him or his enterprise; there is something unholy about him. I feel as if we had been assisting at a witch's sabbath."

The reception-room was crowded where Montana was receiving his friends. He spoke a hasty word or two to each person, who came up to

him in turn, and quietly passed them on. There were no formal presentations. Every one whom Montana did not know, either introduced himself or was taken for granted.

"What may I do to help your cause?" an earnest lady said, with the glitter of a tear in her eyes.

"Believe," said Montana, gently pressing her hand.

She went on satisfied. There did not seem, perhaps, any very direct practical instruction in his one word of advice, but it appeared to content her craving soul.

"I want to be in the thing," said a working man. "I want to help you all I can. What have I to do?"

"Work," said Montana, looking fixedly down into his eyes. The man was of good stature, but Montana was able to look down upon him; and they shook hands, and Montana wrung his friend's rough hand with a gripe which thrilled him.

The man, too, went on his way satisfied. There was not much perhaps in being told to work anyhow, and the one word gave him little guidance as to the best way of assisting Montana's special enterprise. But even one word, accompanied by such a look from such a face, and by the grasp of a hand which the working man found, to his surprise, considerably stronger than his own, was guidance and conviction for the time. The worker

passed on, feeling a sort of vague awe, as if he had discoursed with a prophet.

An elderly, white-haired, smooth-spoken, graceful gentleman, with a double eye-glass, came softly up to Montana, announced himself as the Duke of Magdiel, and said the duchess particularly wished him to request that Mr. Montana would do her the favour of dining with them during his stay in town.

Montana drew back coldly.

"I have not the honour to know you," he said. "I have not come to London to be made a show of. I dine with my friends when I have time. You are not among the friends. I have something else to do in life besides going out to amuse strangers and to be stared at."

The abashed peer mumbled an excuse, of which Montana took little heed. The Duke of Magdiel passed along, disconcerted. Incivility puzzled him; he could not see the use of it.

A member of a small, strange, fantastic sect talked for a moment with Montana — a shabby, eager-looking man, whose wild eyes were looking through unkempt hair.

"We are a strange lot," he said to Montana. "We are not much in favour here. Every one dislikes us. They would persecute us if they could."

"I do not care about that," said Montana.

"People dislike me, and would persecute me if they could. What do you want of me?"

"We'd like to have a word or two quietly with you. Some of our people would like to join with you, and go out to your new place. We are miserably off here. We have no money, and we have no friends—only enemies. Will you let some of us come and see you?"

"Have you a place of meeting?" Montana asked.

"We have a sort of a place up some flights of back stairs, down there."

He jerked his thumb in the supposed direction, and the wild eyes turned towards the east. Somewhere in the East End, doubtless, was the temple of this odd little group of sectaries.

"I will wait on you," said Montana. "Send me a message at once. You have only to name the time that suits you, and I will go there."

This was spoken in a low tone, apparently not meant to be heard; but it so happened that it was heard by most of those in the room. Thus it became known amongst those who were interested in the night's proceedings, that Mr. Montana had repelled with cold contempt the invitation of a duchess, and had promised to go at any time out of his way down to the East End, to wait upon a miserable little group of half-crazy and poverty-stricken fanatics. The effect was happy. It added to the interest felt in Mr. Montana. Even

duchesses were now more anxious than ever to have him under their roofs, and fanatics and sectaries of all kinds were disposed to put full faith in him. The night had been a complete and a splendid success.

A great crowd at the doors of the outer hall waited to catch a glimpse of the new prophet as he passed to the carriage which was known to be waiting for him. But Montana did not go out that way. He passed through a side corridor and a small door in another street, and walked home unseen and alone.

The carriage was there, however, for some time. At last the patient watchers, who still kept hoping for a sight of the prophet, saw that two or three pale and poor-looking girls, apparently of the sempstress class, were put into it by one of the liveried attendants, and heard the coachman get directions to drive them to some place in the Bethnal Green quarter. The patient watchers had something for their delay. They, too, had a story to tell of Mr. Montana. They were able to say to all they met next day, that they had seen Mr. Montana's carriage given up by him for the purpose of driving a few belated milliner girls amongst his audience to their home in Bethnal Green.

CHAPTER VII.

"YOU SAW HER FAIR, NONE ELSE BEING BY."

CAPTAIN MARION'S first idea, when he had got possession of money, was to begin to spend it. His impulse, however, always was to spend for the enjoyment of the people around him rather than his own. He had now fallen in for a good thing, as the result of his once disparaged American speculations, and he was very happy in the prospect of being able to live in a liberal and pleasant manner again. His good fortune brought him a double gratification. First of all, he had the money to spend, and the prospect of a secure and even a rising income; and next, he had the great satisfaction of being able to look boldly in the faces of the prophets of evil, who had kept saying, "Didn't I tell you so?" when he first put his money into American railways, and nothing seemed likely to come out. He was now able to claim for himself the proud possession of judgment and prescience in his speculations, and by his quiet composure of manner and his carefully abstaining from any reference to past censure, he could heap coals of fire upon the heads of those who once would have it that he had brought his family to ruin. He felt a certain satisfaction, too,

in being again able to make something of a figure in the eyes of his own family. He had for a good long time been compelled, as he expressed it himself, to play second fiddle to his son-in-law, Mr. Trescoe, and he thought the time had now come when he was fairly entitled to take the leading position, and to show that he could be head of the family in fact as well as in name.

All these considerations, added to a boundless good nature and an intense love for his daughters, made Captain Marion very happy in the prospect of their first season together in London. It was his intention that he and his two daughters and his daughter Katherine's husband should see out the season in London and then think about their foreign tour. He anticipated immense pleasure from showing his daughters and Miss Rowan everything interesting in London first, and on the Continent afterwards. He had taken a handsome furnished house, with servants and all just as it stood, in one of the streets running off Piccadilly, and meant to make himself very comfortable and even happy for the rest of the season. He soon had many visitors; he gave nice little dinner parties; and amongst the most frequent of his visitors, at regular and irregular hours, was Mr. Montana.

Mr. Aquitaine did not make much of a stay in London. He was always, as he called it, "on the wing." He came up for a day, disappeared

for a few days more, to reappear nobody could tell how soon. A short time after the opening address with which Montana had introduced his great enterprise to the London public, Mr. Aquitaine, who had been staying with his daughter in Captain Marion's house, and was expected to consider it his home whenever he turned up in London, was about to make one of his sudden returns to the north. While smoking a cigar with Captain Marion one morning after breakfast, he was told that a gentleman wished to see him, and was handed a card.

"Now, look here, Marion, here's a young man in whom I take a great deal of interest and there is an odd sort of story about him. He wrote to me the other day; he wants to be introduced to Montana; and if it is right to do the thing, you can do it for him better than I could. But I am not certain whether I ought to encourage him. He had better stay where he is, and not think of starting on adventures."

Captain Marion had a sympathetic interest in everybody going to do anything. He asked with some curiosity who the young man was, and what was his story.

"Well," Aquitaine said, "it's not much of a story, and yet there is a certain oddness about it. He was a very poor lad in my town, years ago; I believe his father and mother were people of education and good family, but they made a run-

away match, and both died poor somehow, and left him. Just at the time of their death—the father died latest—when this lad was seven or eight years old or thereabouts, a man that I knew in the town lost his son. The son disappeared. He had married a girl of good family—young Fanshawe's sister, by the way; you know young Fanshawe? She died. He disappeared. The old man had been thrown into acquaintanceship with this lad, and he was taken by a certain sort of resemblance in the two stories, somehow. He took the boy as his son, and has kept him ever since. He was a livery-stable keeper, and had horses, and made a lot of money, I believe, and he has settled in London now. I knew this young fellow well, and liked him. He used to come to our house, and—well, there is a lot more that I need not trouble you with. Anyhow, I will go and see him, and if I should ask you to introduce him to Montana, you won't mind doing so, will you?"

Captain Marion not only promised, but was delighted at the chance of a new recruit. Already in his mind he was filled with the idea of a romantic, generous, aspiring youth, determined to lend his hand in founding a great enterprise, and destined to be his own lieutenant, companion, and friend in the brilliant portentous movement which he saw before him in the enchanting distance.

Just as he was about to leave the room,

Aquitaine bethought himself of something, and turned back.

"Before I go, Marion," he said, "don't you go putting any of your money into this scheme of Montana's. I am not saying anything against him; he may be very sincere; I dare say he is; but nothing will come of this; and you want your money for your daughters and yourself."

Marion was disposed to be a little evasive—at least, evasive for him. He was afraid of what he considered his friend's terrible practical nature and business habits. Aquitaine passed among the business men of his own town for somewhat of a visionary, because of his generous and charitable disposition.

"It isn't a matter of money," Marion answered; "it's a matter of faith and energy. I think it is a grand idea to start a new world there yonder in the heart of the new world; a place where the true laws of freedom and of health may be fairly tried out, as you know they never can have a chance of being tried under our old systems, even in America, not to say in England. You know that yourself, Aquitaine; I've heard you say twenty times that the laws of health have no fair chance of being tested here."

"Yes, the laws of health, to be sure; I've said that often enough. But, laws of health?—good gracious! your friend is going in for trying out every principle known to the imagination of

man! Art, and science, and religion, and morals, and all the rest, are to be revolutionised. The city is to be like something in the Apocalypse, or in a fairy story. Streets of silver and gold, I believe."

"No, no, nothing of the kind."

"Well, will you promise me not to have anything to do with the whole thing—at least, until you see it tried and have some idea of what it will come to?"

"No, I'll not promise that, certainly," Marion said warmly. "I should much rather promise to have nothing to do with it at all than to look coldly on until it had proved itself, and then to sneak in and claim a share in the glory. That would be like the sailor in the old story, who hid in a cask until the fight was over and his ship had won, and then crept out and asked how much prize-money was coming to him."

Aquitaine remained silent for a moment. Then he said:—

"One word, Marion—I never like worrying people with advice when they have their minds made up, as you have."

"It's not a question of having my mind made up; it is a question of duty. All my life I have had a vague longing for some such chance as this; and it has come. That is all."

"You have a mission, in fact; quite so. Of course, in that case, I need not advise. Well,

there is just this; do you mean to pull your daughters into this business?"

"I don't mean to pull them into it; Katherine is very keen on it already."

"What does her husband say?"

"Oh, well," Marion answered with a smile, "I suppose he says whatever she says."

"Are you all going to be among the pioneers of this interesting enterprise?"

"I shall be among the pioneers or not in it at all," Marion answered resolutely.

"When are the pilgrim fathers going to take shipping? And where is the new colony to be founded?"

"Oh, well, you know, things haven't come as far as that yet. There is a great deal to be done before we get to that."

"I see; I am very glad to know that the site has not been fixed on yet."

"No; that can be done later. As yet it is all but a thought in the mind of one man."

"Indeed! A thought in the mind of one man? I am pleased to know that; may it long remain in that condition! I am less despondent about you all, now that I know that much. Only, I do beg of you, Marion, don't be carried away altogether by the advice of women in a matter of this kind. You are much too apt to be guided and governed by women. Do reflect that in such a case you ought to be the guide. You know how their

feelings and sympathies carry them away. All the better they are for it, as far as feeling goes; but they want some one to control them in a thing like this. They think Montana is a prophet and an angel because he has fine eyes and odd ways."

Marion smiled.

"A bad shot, Aquitaine. My womankind are greatly divided about this enterprise. Sydney is not clear at all about it; and Geraldine—Miss Rowan—is dead against it; she can hardly be got to say a good word for Montana."

"I am very glad to hear it. She has more brains than the lot of you put together. Excuse me, Marion, if I don't flatter you. I was afraid Montana had bewitched all your group of girls. Thank Heaven, Mrs. Aquitaine isn't a woman likely to be moved to any exertion of mind or body; and I don't think my Mel is a very susceptible little person."

"Does Melissa take no interest in all this?" Captain Marion asked, with a certain hesitation. He had had hints from his daughter Katherine which would not have conveyed that impression.

"No; not the least. I don't think she takes much interest in anything. Sometimes I could wish that she had a little more sentiment about her. She seems to me to have almost no feeling at all—in that sentimental way, I mean. Well, well, we can't have everything. It's very satis-

factory to me just now to find that she isn't likely to be much interested in your new founder and prophet. Anyhow, I leave you with an easier mind, Marion, seeing that this grand enterprise is only in the air, so far. What are you going to call your new city, when it is built? Cloud-cuckoo-capital? Xanadu? or is it to have a name like the original name of Rome, which no men are to know or speak?"

The friends parted soon after, each much concerned for the other. Captain Marion felt a certain doubt as to whether he ought not to give Aquitaine a hint that his daughter did not seem so absolutely unconcerned about the Montana project as he supposed; but he did not know enough to justify him, he thought, in disturbing Aquitaine's mind with suspicion or alarm. It might be only a nonsensical idea of Katherine's. Katherine did not like girls, and always suspected them of something or other. If anything more were to come of it, if the girl should really form a wish to go out to the new colony, Aquitaine must be consulted by her, and would know how to act. In any case, the colony was not likely to be founded for some time to come. There was time enough yet—and Marion usually got out of any mental perplexities by reflecting that there was time enough yet. He took it for granted that in any case Aquitaine would not allow his daughter to have anything to do with the enterprise; and there

was no harm, therefore, to come of letting' things alone for the moment.

Aquitaine was greatly relieved to find that the enterprise was not yet starting into real life. He knew enough of his friend to know that with time for a change of ideas the change might easily come. Still, he was disturbed about him. "On my life," he said to himself, "I wish he would marry that girl. It's absurd a man at his time of life, with a married daughter, thinking of getting married again; but I do believe in his case it would be the best thing he could do. She is a sensible and a clever girl; and she would make a capital wife, I am sure. She would keep him in order charmingly without his knowing it." In true masculine fashion Mr. Aquitaine never stopped to ask himself the question whether it was likely Miss Rowan would marry Captain Marion. Men usually assume that a man has only to ask and to have, except in the case of some woman of their own family, when they are apt to think of his proposal as like the fellow's impudence.

As he went to meet his visitor, Aquitaine kept looking at the visitor's card. It bore the name of "Clement Hope."

"No 'Mr.,' of course," Aquitaine murmured. "Rights of man, to be sure; equality, and all that. Exactly. Poor Clem.! Poor Clem.!"

He then entered a neat little reception-room and found poor Clem. himself.

Clement Hope was sitting in a great arm-chair, with his hands hanging listlessly down between his knees, and his eyes fixed on the floor. His whole attitude and aspect suggested uncertainty and despondency; suggested the condition of one who does not know in the least what to do with himself. Otherwise the young man, except for his dress, seemed as if he might have stepped out of a painting by Andrea del Sarto. Melancholy eyes, careless hair, a short moustache, a short peaked beard, a poetically loose collar, dark complexion, a sort of feminine gentleness of expression, contrasting curiously enough with a robust figure and strongly made hands and wrists—these were the principal characteristics of the figure at which Mr. Aquitaine now looked with a sort of compassionate friendliness.

They had a cordial, almost affectionate meeting.

"So Clem, my boy, you want to be up and doing? You want to join the enterprise of the great Montana?"

"Yes, Mr. Aquitaine — I want to do something."

"But why were you thinking about that just now? You could not possibly leave your father—I may call him your father?"

"You may, Mr. Aquitaine; he has been better to me than most fathers, I fancy. No, I should

never think of leaving him, as things go now. That would never do."

"I should think not," Aquitaine said quickly. "You should be a precious ungrateful fellow if you were to think of leaving him — and I know you are not ungrateful, Clem." He hastened to add this, for the young man's cheeks reddened.

"I would go into the pit of Acheron for him!"

"Hullo!" Aquitaine interrupted; "pit of Acheron?"

"Well, why not pit of Acheron?" Clement said good-humouredly, but looking a little abashed at the manner in which his emphatic declaration was met.

"Why not, indeed! Only, it sounded a little poetic, didn't it? Are you taking to poetry, my boy?"

"Oh, no, I wish I could!"

"Well, you can read and enjoy it — that's enough."

"Yes, I can do that—thank Heaven."

"You are in earnest," Aquitaine said.

"Yes, I am in earnest about everything. I mean all I say, Mr. Aquitaine; I feel all I say."

Their eyes met sympathetically.

"I am sure you do; I am sorry for it sometimes," Aquitaine replied. They had some little secret between them, evidently.

"You have not got rid of that nonsense yet, then, I suppose?" Mr. Aquitaine said, after a moment of silence.

"You mean about Miss Aquitaine?"

"I mean that. That is the nonsense."

"No, I have not got rid of that. I mean to carry that always with me. It isn't nonsense; at least, of course, I know it would be nonsense if I were really foolish enough to fancy that anything could come of it. But you know, Mr. Aquitaine, I never did that; you know I never spoke a word of it to any one but yourself; and only to you to explain what might have seemed strange and rude, perhaps, otherwise."

"My good boy," Aquitaine said gravely, "you know what I think of your conduct. You know I think you acted like a true gentleman and splendid fellow. If I had a son, Clem, I should have wished him in such a case to act exactly as you did, and not otherwise. I should have been proud of him; I dare say I should have thought him too good for any girl that ever put on a petticoat. I think so of you. When I speak of nonsense, it isn't anything about the money Melissa may have, or the sort of thing that is called position in a provincial town. In my place we all earn a living one way or another; we have no gentlemen there, unless you come to the county families, who in their hearts don't recognise much difference between Melissa's father and yours. I don't mean

that the thing wouldn't suit at all. Melissa isn't your form, take my word for it. The child is my darling little daughter; but I can see with half an eye that she has more faults than she has dresses—even."

"Please don't, Mr. Aquitaine."

"You would rather think she has no faults, I dare say. But, after all, I fancy I am a good deal fonder of Melissa than you are——"

Clement shook his head.

"Well, I shall be fonder of her two years hence than you will. Oh, yes; you need not protest. We have all suffered in that way and got over it. I tell you, Clem., I like you so well that if everybody else concerned in the matter was willing, and you had more money than they could count on 'Change in half a day, my advice to you would be not to marry Melissa Aquitaine. Come, it isn't often a father has given advice like that, is it? But it is sincere. I know my little girl better than you do, and I don't believe she could make you a good wife. I don't think she is capable of much love. I don't think she could put up with anything or be of one humour long. I sometimes think she is incapable of loving — and for *his* sake, whoever he may be, I should almost wish it were so. There! those are my sentiments."

"All the same, I love her."

"No, you don't. I know you think you do; but you don't."

"Perhaps you know what I feel better than I do myself," Clement said, with a melancholy smile.

"I know much better than you what the strength of the feeling is, and how long it is likely to last. Stuff and nonsense! If I found you groaning with a toothache, and were to tell you that you would think the gout, if you had it, much worse, you probably wouldn't believe me. Perhaps you would ask whether I could judge of your feelings better than you could yourself. I should say, Yes, and when you came to have the gout, you would know that I was right."

"The cases are rather different. You can't know what I feel, Mr. Aquitaine."

"Of course I know you think you feel more than anybody ever did before or ever will again. But, my good boy, that in itself is only one familiar symptom. That only confirms my view. We have all been like that. Come, come, you are in the age for falling in love; and Melissa came in your way, and she is a pretty girl, and her very little pertnesses and ill-humours had a charm for you. Tut, tut! I know all about it, you'll find. And you have taken her for your ideal. You are in love with your ideal girl, not Melissa Aquitaine. She isn't any one's ideal, even her father's."

"Well, anyhow, that's one reason why I want to get away out of this. I want to live in some earnest, active, striving sort of way; I want to fight a stiff battle of life."

Aquitaine smiled.

"We miss those Saracens terribly," he said. "It was such a relief to every disappointed fellow in the chivalrous days to be able to go and fight the Saracens. Well, perhaps the West may help us out of our difficulty. You want to have a hand in Montana's project—his New Jerusalem—I suppose?"

"I should like to know something about it. Of course I couldn't go now. I wouldn't leave *him* for all the objects in the world, unless he was quite willing. But I can't help always looking out for something that may turn me free to go wherever I choose."

"You are not speculating on his death, surely?" Aquitaine said, with a certain surprise and harshness in his tone.

"No; I don't like to think of such a misfortune as that. And happily we need not think of it; he has splendid health, and has years and years before him, I hope. No; I was thinking of something that would make him happy, and set me free to go and bury myself wherever I chose. I was thinking that some day his son will come back to him."

"Why on earth do you think that?"

"Well, for one thing, he is firmly convinced of it himself. You see, he never heard any account of his son's death; and he is convinced he will come back some day."

Aquitaine shook his head.

"Either he is dead long ago, or he has no intention of coming back. Why should he never have written? Did he never write?"

"Never."

"Then, why should he never have written if he meant to come back? Oh, no; he is either dead, or he has married and forgotten all about the people at home. He has grown rich, and does not want to come back; or he is poor, and is ashamed. The chances are many to one, I should say, that he is dead."

"Still, if it should not be so—and he firmly believes it will not be so—I should feel sadly out of place here. There would be no need of me any more. I should feel in the way more than anything else. You have no idea how he longs for his son—every year more and more."

"What does your father want you to do?" Aquitaine asked.

"Well, that is the worst of it; he wants me to do nothing. He wants me just to stay with him always, and tells me I shall have plenty of money when—that is, afterwards, you know.

But that seems to me an unmanly sort of life. I am hanging on, doing nothing——”

“You are learning something. You are studying, I suppose?”

“Yes, I am studying a good deal, and I should be happy enough if that seemed the right sort of thing to do. I can sit in a room with books half the day and half the night too, and be perfectly happy, but that doesn't seem the way that a man ought to spend his life. I am fond of books, but I am afraid I should never do anything in the literary line. I don't think I have any gift of poetry or prose, or anything else. I don't believe I have the gift of expression at all,” Clement said despondently. “I am sure I couldn't paint a picture, or model a statue, or make a drawing for a house, or do anything of that kind. I can't expect to lead the life of a *dilettante* scholar in a library. I think I should make a good settler or an explorer—these are times when one may easily find something to do with energy and enterprise about it. But all that would only come up if what I told you of were to happen. If this young man should come back——”

“He would not be much of a young man now,” said Aquitaine.

“No; I forgot about that. I was thinking of him as if he always ought to be what he was when he went away. If he should come back, I

should be *de trop* in the business, to say the least of it."

"Did you ever see the son?" Aquitaine asked.

"I never saw him; no. I never even heard he had gone until afterwards."

"I never saw him," said Aquitaine; "at least, I never remember seeing him. I know he was in our office for some years; but there were a lot of people there, and I was about the world then more than I am now, and my attention was never called to him. I do not even know what he was like."

"His father thinks he was like me," Clement murmured dreamily, "but that must be a mere fancy. I believe he was very good-looking."

Aquitaine looked quickly at the young man; but Clement was evidently not fishing for a compliment. There was a mirror near him; he had not even glanced at it. He was moodily looking down.

"Clearly that must have been a mere fancy," Aquitaine said, with a smile.

"Oh, yes!" Clement replied.

"Well—I am in a difficulty about you," Aquitaine said, "and I'll put it into plain words. I don't like the idea of your going out on this wild-goose chase to found your new Atlantis or whatever it is; and I should be terribly sorry to

hear that you had left the kind old man who has been so good to you."

"I'll not leave him while he wants me; that's certain. Nothing on earth will make me do that."

"Very well; I quite believe you mean all you say. I don't like the chance of your being taken in tow by Montana either: I don't believe in him. But, then, I hate the idea of your wasting any more of your time thinking over this little crotchety girl of mine. Will you promise me to try to shake off that thought—to get rid of it once for all?"

"Why should I do that? It makes life sweet to me. It doesn't do her any harm. I shall never speak of it to her or to any one. But it is all I have that makes life dear—the thought of her."

"In Heaven's name!" Aquitaine exclaimed, "why don't you take to writing poems? It would be ever so much better; you could work off the nonsense that way. The rhymes take so much out of one! The most unmanageable poets of all are the poets who don't compose any more. My dear good Clem., will you promise me to begin at once a series of sonnets—a short series, only a hundred and fifty or so—to my daughter?"

"You laugh at me, but I don't mind."

"No; that's the worst of it; I wish you did."

"Because I know you mean it kindly. Nothing coming from you can give me pain."

"Oh, hang it all!—I know; because I am the father of HER. Well, listen, Clem.; you said you never would speak to her—Her, with a big capital—unless you had my consent. My dear boy, you have my consent. Nothing better could possibly happen to you than to try your chance. If that doesn't cure you, nothing will. Go along, there's a good fellow, and ask my daughter to marry you. Faith of a heavy father—a somewhat heavy-hearted father now and then—if she consents, I'll not stand in the way; and neither, I can promise you, will her mother."

The young man's eyes had flashed fire for a moment, but then he became graver than ever.

"Now you really are laughing at me," he said, "and this is a sharper jest than the other."

"I am not laughing at you," Aquitaine replied, in a tone that was almost stern. "I am very much in earnest. I don't believe any one can cure you of this nonsense half so well as my daughter herself. Go to her; tell her in poetic language how much you love her; offer her your hand and heart—I have reason to believe you'll find her in a remarkably melting mood just now."

"I know well enough she would only laugh at me; I don't want to ask her; I don't want her to marry me, if it comes to that; why should such a girl think of a fellow like me? It would be a shame. I only want to love her."

"Go and tell her so," Aquitaine said, "and then let me hear from you again."

CHAPTER VIII.

ROMEO AND ROSALINE.

GOOD fortune and bad fortune had combined to make Montana what he now was. The buffets and the rewards had conspired to decide his fate, each the wrong way. The buffets did not either correct or discourage; the rewards did not satisfy. His personal beauty was perhaps his first stimulus to the belief that he must be destined for great things. He felt that the gods had set their seal on him by making him beautiful, as the Greek orator declared of Phryne. His love-match had shown him that he could impress women with a sense of his power. His grief and his disappointment had filled him with a despair which, while it lasted, was akin to madness. He had suffered intensely; sorrow, dull, protracted, seemingly hopeless struggle, and iron poverty had tried to bear him down. He had seemed as if destined to end a drear life by some death of utter misery. Yet through all his worst times he had felt the same faith in his destiny—in his mission. He was confident that he was tried in the fire of adversity.

only that he might be made the stronger for some great work which was to be assigned to him.

Men more pious and far better instructed than Montana have also believed that in every sorrow inflicted on them there was only a purpose personal to them, to make them stronger for this world, or touch their souls so as to make them fitter for the next. The loved father perishes in his prime; the wife of a man's youth is taken from his side; the little daughter is snatched from the blossoming promise of her sweet childhood; and the survivor, not content with bending to the will of the benignant powers above, and quietly believing that all must be for the best, complacently makes a moral special to himself, and assumes that others have been victimised in order that his poor little personality may have all the benefit. It does not occur to him to ask why any other should suffer in order that he might be made the better; whether Providence may not have designs of a larger mould than those which concerned only his particular career. Montana was one of that class of suffering egotists. Any stroke of fate falling on himself or those he loved—they were not many—he assumed to be intended for his own special behoof, in order to fit him all the more for the great mission whereof the nature and object were yet to be disclosed. This almost sublime egotism sustained him. Prosperity came at once along various paths, and he took the

prosperity as he had taken the suffering. He accepted it as a proof that he was destined for great things. His egotism case-hardened him against fear and against arrogance.

For a time, after the climax of his struggle had passed away, everything seemed to go well with him. He had made a fair repute in the American Civil War; first having entered the campaign merely as a philanthropical attendant on the hospitals, and then serving as a soldier. He had taken up philanthropic land speculations after the war; taken them up without any primary purpose of making money; and even where the success of the philanthropic scheme was doubtful, the fact that money came in to Montana was beyond all doubt. He turned lecturer, became a sort of unconsecrated preacher; and he drew fashionable crowds after him in the United States, even when he most earnestly proclaimed that he desired only the presence of the poor. He might have made a wealthy match easily enough at any time. Rich women had told him as much, and he had only drawn back. He gave away money freely and in large sums. His career seemed absolutely free from any evidence of personal object; and yet, all who were not devotees in him distrusted him.

There were three orders of opinion concerning Montana. There was first the enthusiastic worship of the devotee, which does not call for minute analysis. The devotees were, to be sure, chiefly

women; but they were not by any means women only. There were many men, wherever Montana was known, who believed in him as their hero, or prophet, or saint. There were business men who on his advice would have flung all their property into some speculation of which they had never heard the day before. There were men who would have voted for any candidate or anything on a word of recommendation from him. In this country we commonly think of the society of America as made up only of shrewd, eager-faced business men, who set the making of money above every other purpose in life. We hear little of that very considerable proportion of the men of every American community, who are as accessible to the influence of sentimentalism or emotionalism of some kind as the heroine of an old romance might have been. The worship of the devotees made one order of opinion. Then came a certain proportion of kindly unbelievers, who merely shook their heads and quietly said that Montana was crazed. Lastly came those, not a few in number who declared him to be a mere quack, a particular shallow impostor. It is surprising how many powerful arguments each believer could bring forward in support of his theory. Speak to each one in turn, and let him have it all his own way for the time, and he would give reasons that made conviction seem hardly to be avoided. Then speak to one of the other school, and you began in-

sensibly to be drawn into a recognition of the soundness of his theory.

The impostor theory was greatly supported by the fact that Montana, in company, evidently kept a constant guard over his utterances. It would not need to be a very keen observer to see that Montana was always watching you and himself. He never answered a question promptly. He looked quietly at his questioner, and shaped his answer very slowly. Sometimes he did not answer at all—merely shook his head and slightly smiled, and could not be got to give any reply. It was impossible not to see now and then, by the expression of his eyes, that he was thinking what he ought to say, or whether he ought to say anything. On the other hand, his admirers, admitting all these peculiarities, saw in them only fresh evidence of sincerity and of inspiration. When, they asked, did Montana on one of his platforms ever want a word or an answer? What could be more rapid, instantaneous, than the flash of his decisive reply to the port-fire touch of a question? For what suggested difficulty in morals or in actual life had he not the quick word of guidance for those who believed in him? This, too, was true. In ordinary society, his admirers said, he is simply a man *distract*, conscious of higher purposes and occupations, only enduring the dinner-table, and evading idle chatter.

Montana might have been the happiest man

living on the earth. He had found himself suddenly lifted to that dangerous elevation, the height of his wishes. He was one of the most marked figures of a London season. Wherever he went people looked at him, and after him, and started as he passed, and called the attention of their friends to him, and whispered his name, and sometimes indeed did not even whisper it, but spoke it loudly enough to have hurt the feelings of a different sort of man, but only enough to thrill Montana with a new sense of his success. Women of all ranks paid court to him, and frankly conveyed their admiration of him. There was supposed to be something like a mysterious sanctity about his assumed character of leader, priest, and prophet, which rendered unnecessary the becoming reticence that would have had to be adopted in the case of a more worldly hero. A great many London men, too, of all ranks and classes, admired him and believed in him. He was a hero to a considerable mass of the working population, who had a dash of free-thinking in them. He was not robust enough to satisfy the ordinary Radical artisan of cities, but to those whose views of life were a little more shadowy, and a little less political, he served admirably as a hero and an orator. He was in society, passing through the very best of London society sometimes, and yet wholly ungoverned by its conventions and above its rules, even regarded as the more interesting

because he thus set himself above its ordinances and paid them no attention. He had several little habits which at first made people stare, and always made some people angry, and forced others to smile, and yet in the eyes of his admirers seemed all the more becoming to his position. When he went to dine at a great house, he shook hands with the butler or the footman, as well as with the master or mistress, if the butler or footman happened to have become an acquaintance of his by attending any of his meetings. His manner was always stately, grave, and sweet. Nothing surprised him. He had the composure of a Red Indian chief, who disdains to be dazzled or even moved by any of the splendours of civilisation.

Montana's name was constantly in the papers. He attended meetings of almost all kinds which had any savour of philanthropy or the higher life about them, and he possibly committed himself to a good many movements and causes which could hardly have worked very well in combination. His ambition had now nearly reached its crowning point. He was the hero of a London season, the prophet of a large number of faithful followers, the leader of a great new enterprise in civilisation, which had not yet become troublesome, inconvenient, or disappointing, for the good reason that it had not yet even begun to move; and he was the idol of a great many admiring and attractive women. But there was one thought which dis-

turbed him. He remembered past times more keenly than he could have wished. His passionate longing was to bury all the early past in actual forgetfulness. He hated to have to think of the origin from which he sprung. He detested the thought of his father having been a livery-stable keeper who gave lessons in riding. If his father had been dead he would easily enough have forgotten all about him, and might have satisfied his conscience by an easy kind of penitence, all the more easy to certain minds because, being unavailing and too late, it involves no considerable trouble or self-sacrifice. But he had found that his father was not dead; was living just now in London. The thought constantly disturbed him. He could not be sure of forgetting the past, or burying the past, as long as this living link with it was present and near. Besides, despite all his egotism and his confused dreamings and aspirations, he had still some remains of a sensitive conscience. It stung him now and then to think that he knew of his father's existence, and not only did not go to him and announce himself as the long-lost son, but was anxious above all things never to meet him, never to be recognised by him, and never to have to face the terrible alternative of acknowledging himself the livery-stable keeper's son, or bluntly denying the relationship. It was brought home to his inner convictions sometimes, that if his father and he should meet in

public, and his father should claim him, he would repudiate the claim and deny that he was his father's son. He struggled with this horrible thought and tried to escape it, as was his way, in dreams. Montana was a dreamer, and not a man of imagination. Had he had imagination, it would have fed itself on other food than his own morbid personality. It would have created images for him out of "the barren realms of darkness," and have peopled his lonelier hours with beings that might some of them have become his ideal and his guide. But he was merely a dreamer, and could think only of his own plans, and his past and his future; and he brooded so on these, that the real was often not to be distinguished by him from the unreal. He began to persuade himself that his obscure past must have been but a dream. He was gliding into the conviction that he would be right in repudiating any claim which an obscure person professing to be his father might venture to make. He could not endure the ridicule of such a revelation; his cause must suffer by it; it could not therefore be in the nature of things or the will of Heaven that one entrusted with so great a mission should be left a victim to men's scorn.

Meanwhile, his friendship with Captain Marion became closer and closer. His visits always delighted Marion, but did not seem otherwise to spread much joy around them. Geraldine Rowan

avoided him as much as she could do without attracting attention. Melissa saw him only; rarely was spoken to by him.

Melissa was growing daily paler, more languid, and more unsatisfactory in condition. Mr. Aquitaine many times thought it would be better to take her back to the country again; but Melissa obstinately resisted; and when any little trial of strength of will arose, Melissa was in the habit of carrying the day. She did so in this instance, and she positively declared that she found herself much better in London than she would be anywhere else, and Mr. Aquitaine gave way. There was apparently nothing in her condition for which the doctor's skill could do any good. Melissa began by refusing to see a doctor; and then, when by a variety of stratagems she was brought into the presence of a physician and induced to talk with him, he really found nothing to suggest any ailment which his craft could cure.

Mr. Aquitaine once took an opportunity of saying a word to Miss Marion, and urged her to try and find out what was amiss with his daughter. Sydney tried her best, but could not succeed. She was unable to put herself exactly into sympathy with her wilful little friend. Just about this time, Geraldine Rowan had been making up her mind to endeavour to establish something like a friendship between Melissa and herself. She had resolved, hesitated, resolved again, again hesitated; but

now a word from Miss Marion about her attempt and its failure decided her to try her best. She took Melissa by surprise, invaded her unexpectedly in her own room one day, and broke into the question at once.

"I am afraid you are not well," she said, "and I am sure Mr. Aquitaine must be uneasy about you."

"Has he made you his confidante?" Melissa asked, with eyes in which an anticipated controversy already sparkled.

"No, indeed," Miss Rowan said; "he never spoke to me about it, but you seem to me to be out of health and spirits somehow; and if that makes me uneasy on your account, think how much more uneasy it must make him."

"If my father is uneasy about me," Melissa said, "he can tell me so."

"Come, my dear girl," Miss Rowan said, "you might be more friendly with me. I believe they say here that you are sick, but I do not think so. I mean, I don't think you are sick in any way that a doctor could cure. I think you are out of spirits. I think something has gone wrong with you. Perhaps something has disappointed you; and surely these are things that one girl might well talk to another girl about. We are friends, are we not?"

"I suppose you mean it well," Melissa answered; "I dare say you do; you are just the sort

of girl who means everything well. Everybody says you do everything well; but I do not. I seldom mean things well, and I don't think I am at all inclined to be a friend of yours."

"Yet I want to win your friendship very much," said Geraldine; "and I think I could deserve it. You have always shown yourself cold and unfriendly to me, but I don't mind that; I don't care for misunderstandings of that kind, and I don't a bit mind being met with an ungenial answer. I don't care about personal dignity. I want to be your friend."

"We can never be friends," said Melissa, getting up from her chair; "I hate you, and there is an end of it."

Geraldine was certainly somewhat shaken from her composure by this blunt declaration. To be told that one is actually hated, and told this by a little girl whose flashing eyes and trembling lips show that she means exactly all that she says, and at the same time not to have the least idea of anything which could give cause for such a feeling of detestation—this would be enough to disturb the nerves of even a philosopher. Geraldine was not a philosopher, but only a bright, good-hearted girl, who thought she saw a way of rendering a service, and was determined to go on if she could. She recovered her composure after a moment.

"Why do you hate me, Miss Aquitaine? I

always liked you, and I am sure I never did anything that could make you feel so bitterly against me."

"I hate you all the same," said Melissa. She seemed to find a certain sense of relief in the declaration.

"But won't you tell me why? There may be some mistake. There must be. You have fancied I said or did something which I did not say or do. I am not at all a good hater myself; but if I did hate any one, I am sure I should tell the reason."

Melissa turned away and seated herself again in her chair. It was a great luxurious armchair, large enough to hold the portly frame of some old-fashioned grandfather, or to embrace all the ample draperies of an eighteenth-century belle. Melissa curled herself up in it, and looked with her beaming eyes, her pretty face, and her pouting, impatient gestures, like some beautiful but dangerous little animal—a wild cat perhaps, or a snake, coiled up, and only waiting for a spring on some enemy.

Geraldine went over and knelt by the side of the chair, leant her head against it, and took Melissa's reluctant hand and held it firmly, as indeed she had strength enough to do; and then said, in the soothing tone one uses with a sick child, "You must tell me why you don't like me. I will not go until you explain it all. I am

quite determined there shall be no unkindness between you and me if I can possibly prevent it. You know how much I like your father, and I think he likes me."

"Of course he does," Melissa said; "everybody likes you except myself, and that's just it: everybody likes you; the people I like best in the world like you better than they like me."

"What people that you like best in the world," Geraldine asked, "like me better than they like you? Your father is intensely fond of you. I never saw any more fond of a girl; and your mother, and everybody I know. How could they care for me in that way? I am only a girl to whom they are friendly, and whom they saw for the first time a few weeks ago, and soon won't see any more. How can you grudge me three passing kindness?"

"No, it is not that," said Melissa; "it is not for my father. It is for—for everybody."

And Melissa burst into a passion of tears.

Geraldine was touched to the heart by this sudden and unexpected outbreak. Now she felt sure indeed that poor Melissa's trouble was of the spirit and not of the body; but what could she do to soothe her? How could she ask her for a confidence which, for aught she knew, might concern some family tale not to be told any stranger's ear? Melissa's own words showed that it had something to do with herself. Could it be that Melissa was

jealous of the friendship which the Marions, father and daughter, showed to Geraldine? This seemed hardly possible; and yet, what else was there? Meantime, she found nothing better to do than to put her arm, with gentle resoluteness, round Melissa's neck and draw the girl towards her, and quietly press her little nervous hand in token of friendship and sympathy. Melissa at all events made no resistance now. Geraldine began to hope that she would soon return the pressure of sympathy.

A knock at the door made the girls start. A servant brought a card of Miss Aquitaine.

"Do please read the name; can't you read the name?" Melissa asked in a tone of petulance.

Geraldine took the card. "Clement Hope," she said.

"Oh, I can't see him; I won't see him. Pray send him away. Tell him to call again to-morrow; next week; next year."

"Who is he? A friend of your father?"

"Oh, yes;—wait outside, Jane; I'll call you in a moment. Oh, yes. My father delights in him; adores him; my father likes everybody. He is a dreadful man—not my father, but Clement Hope; a dreadful boy; a silly, sickening goose. He takes it into his ridiculous head, I believe, to fall in love with me—at least, I believe he does—and I hate him."

"You seem to hate us 'all, dear, don't you?" Geraldine said with a smile.

Melissa positively smiled in return. The very absurdity which she saw in the visit of her hapless lover seemed to rouse her into better spirits.

"I don't think I hate you now so much as I did; and, anyhow, I know you are just the sort of good girl to get me out of this scrape. How could I go and see him? Look at my eyes; look at my cheeks; how could I see any one? Will you see him, Miss Rowan? I'll call you Geraldine if you will go and see him and send him away. Tell him to call to-morrow; papa wouldn't like it if we simply turned him away. Say I'm not well, and I'm *not* well; get rid of him for to-day. I needn't ask you to be kind to him, for you are kind to every one; it's your way; you like it; I don't. But he's a nice boy, people say, if he were not such a fool; and I suppose, after all, he isn't much more of a fool than other creatures."

"I don't see any particular evidence of folly in what you say of him," Geraldine said with a kindly smile. "I am not at all surprised; I can imagine a very wise boy falling in love with you."

"Can you, really? That's very nice of you to say, anyhow. But he is such a nuisance all the same, and I won't have it," Melissa declared with renewed energy.

"I'll go and see him with pleasure," Miss Row-

an said. "When may he come?" For she fancied that, somehow, Melissa did not really want to have him dismissed once for all.

"I would much rather he never came, but papa wouldn't stand that, I am afraid, even from me. Let him come to-morrow at five. There will be other people here then, and he can't talk to me. He can talk to you. I dare say you will discover all sorts of great and good qualities in him. I declare I think he is just such another good person as you are—good-natured and sweet; and not malicious and bad-tempered, and all that, like some who shall be nameless."

Miss Rowan went at once to see the fond youth whom Melissa would not favour. Clement turned round with deepened colour and sparkling eyes when he heard the rustle of a woman's dress. Even Miss Rowan, for all her short sight, could not fail to see a shade of disappointment which came over his face as he looked upon a strange young woman and not Melissa. Geraldine's heart was touched by his expression. He looked very handsome and winning, she thought, and worthy of all compassion. It came over her mind that if she could have a brother, she could wish to have one like him.

"Miss Aquitaine begs you will excuse her," she said; "she is not quite well to-day, and cannot see any one. But she hopes you will call to-morrow about five."

"Miss Marion, I presume?" Clement said.

"No, not Miss Marion; Miss Rowan, a friend of Captain Marion's—and of Miss Aquitaine, too."

"She will see you to-morrow; yes, certainly. She is not seriously unwell, but she is not well enough to see any one to-day. But she will see you to-morrow; I can promise you that."

She smiled, and held out her hand to him as he was taking his leave. Their eyes met; and Clement knew, both by her look and by the touch of her hand, that she somehow had his secret and felt sympathy with him.

CHAPTER IX.

ON TOWER HILL.

CLEMENT HOPE had come apparently on a fool's errand. From the moment of his leaving Mr. Aquitaine the day before, he had been filled with a wild desire to take the father at his word and go straight away and propose for the daughter. He could not possibly have explained why this insane impulse took possession of him; but it seized him in a moment, and could not be shaken off.

"Anyhow, it will end the matter," he thought, and he felt a sort of wild and bitter desire that his repulse might be all as painful as Mr. Aquitaine had led him to expect. Let the knife be

applied to the diseased part of his frame; let the cautery burn out the idle passion which consumed him. The sooner the better. So he paid his visit and only saw Geraldine. Next day he came again, promptly at five, and sent up his card to Miss Aquitaine.

He was shown into a waiting-room, and he remained there what seemed to him an unending time. His pulses throbbed, and there was a singing in his ears, and he saw objects flickering before him. He sat down; he stood up; he tried to walk up and down the room. His agony was intense. A door opened at last, and a servant came and told him Miss Aquitaine wished him to come upstairs. He followed, feeling more and more alarmed and confused as he approached nearer to the sacred presence.

Clement had expected anything rather than the kind of anticlimax which awaited him. He had made up his mind that somehow he was to be alone with Miss Aquitaine, and now he was shown into a room in which his uncertain eyes could only at first make out that there were several persons. The room was dark with curtains and draperies, and closed *jalousies*, and lowered blinds, to keep out the rays of the sun; and Clement could for a while hardly discover whether its occupants were people he knew or not. He stood hesitating on the threshold, and apparently looking for Miss Aquitaine, who did not seem in the least degree

concerned to relieve his anxiety. His card had been just the card of the ordinary visitor, and it contained certainly no mysterious impress about it to forebode of a wild young lover and absurd proposal; and yet poor Clement had, in a vague way, taken it for granted that if he was to be seen at all by Miss Aquitaine, he was to be seen alone and to have an opportunity of making his declaration and receiving sentence of banishment. Now he came into an ordinary drawing-room, with four or five persons, no doubt of the most commonplace kind, shutting off his cold-hearted true-love from his sight. He advanced into the room, however, as composedly as he could, and he actually succeeded in seeing Miss Aquitaine. She was seated on an ottoman, her profile turned to him; she was talking to a lady, and apparently not thinking about him in the least. He had to go up and call her attention, in the most unheroic and commonplace manner, with the vapid words, "How do you do, Miss Aquitaine?"

The moment he had said these words he felt that a declaration of love would, under any circumstances, be impossible for that time.

Miss Aquitaine looked round very composedly, and answered his question to him, with apparently little interest in any answer,

"How do you do, Mr. Hope?"

"I did not know you were in town until the other day."

"No?" said she. "We have not been long here."

"I hope you are enjoying yourself," he remarked.

"Yes," she replied, "we have been enjoying ourselves;" in a manner which, whether she meant it or not, almost seemed to imply that at that precise moment she was not enjoying herself.

"I saw Mr. Aquitaine the day before yesterday," murmured the forlorn youth.

"Indeed?" said the damsel; "he has gone home again."

This was dreadful. It was impossible for any lover to get on well after such a fashion as this. Besides, he had paid his compliments to the young lady, he had said his say, and there really seemed nothing for him now but either to fall back and talk to somebody else, or make his escape out of the room as soon as he decently could, and never come back any more. He tried to say another word or two to Melissa, but received neither assistance nor countenance from the young lady, who was now not looking at him at all. He felt himself constrained to fall back. He looked round for somebody else to speak to. There were two or three ladies and one or two gentlemen. He was about wildly to address one of the men who was nearest, and remark to him that it was a fine day, when he was suddenly saved from his

embarrassment by the friendly voice of one of the ladies.

"I am glad to see you again, Mr. Hope. I suppose you are a Londoner; now you can tell me something I want to know about London. We all happen to be strangers here."

He looked in the face of the lady—the lady?—no; the beneficent and redeeming angel who had thus rescued him from utter confusion, had taken him by the hand and drawn him within the circle of living humanity. She was tall and dark, and, as he thought, strikingly handsome. One of the faces he most admired in art was the face of the ascending Madonna in that immortal picture of Titian's which stands in the great gallery by the Venetian canal. To his somewhat bewildered eyes it now seemed as though the face and the kindly expression of the girl talking to him were almost as beautiful and delightful as the Madonna of his æsthetic dreams.

Then in an instant he saw that it was the girl who had spoken so kindly to him the day before, and had pledged herself to procure him that interview which now seemed so hopeful and satisfactory; and he felt that she was asking him about London only to relieve him from an embarrassment which she could well understand and feel for. Clement hastened to say that he knew all about London, and could guide anybody everywhere. It turned out that, among other things,

Miss Rowan particularly wanted to walk round the Tower of London; to see and study Tower Hill; and she wanted some one to go with her and tell her all about it, and let her linger on any particular spot; some one who was not a professional guide. Miss Marion wanted to go too, and even Melissa would go; but Captain Marion hated old places, especially places down among dingy, narrow streets; and other gentlemen had no particular knowledge of the Tower, and had only a dim recollection of having seen it long ago on the same day as the Thames Tunnel. Geraldine positively declined to go with any one who regarded the Tower from that point of view. Clement would have been delighted at that moment to act the part of one of the professional guardians of the Tower, beefeater costume and all, if it could have relieved him of the sense of being in everybody's way, and a subject of derision to himself and all the earth.

So it was arranged that next day Clement was to "personally conduct" a select party to Tower Hill, and that the select party were to walk all the way, and to be shown Eastcheap as they went along, in memory of the wild Prince, and Poins, and Jack Falstaff.

It was a dull and grey afternoon when they reached the Tower. The day had been a very unusual one for summer; not, indeed, unusual because it had been raining heavily in the forenoon,

but because there was something more of late winter or early spring than of summer in the atmosphere, and even in the soft rain. When the rain ceased the sky was still heavily hung with grey clouds, and what glimpses could be seen between the dim masses were themselves only a faint and more delicate grey, with streaks of silvery sunlight slanting across. Fancy herself might have been inclined to fail before the prospect of a muddy walk round the Tower, but the young ladies who had resolved on the expedition were not so easily to be discouraged. Miss Rowan had lived in a country where you must make up your mind to go out occasionally in rain and snow, and to tramp over very muddy roads, or else resolve to house yourself and hibernate during all the months between late November and early March. To her, therefore, it seemed nothing to encounter the soft mud of Tower Hill and the possibility of another descent of the rain-showers. The Tower looked picturesque, old, and dreamlike under the heavy sky, of which itself was only, it might seem, a softer shade. With its moat, its trees, its old walls, and its round-topped turrets and ancient weathercocks, it looked like a building that might have been moulded out of the clouds themselves, so entirely in harmony was it with the prevailing atmosphere. It was the London of an older time symbolised and made living in stone and mortar. Miss Rowan, like most enthusiastic girls who have

been born in America or who have lived there, was full of interest in every memorial of London in its olden days, in every place which had an association attached to it, which brought her back to history, or poetry, or romance. As she looked at the Tower under that peculiar atmosphere, it seemed to her to be worthy a question whether the world has anywhere a pile of buildings more interesting and better fitted to speak to all the feelings. The river could be seen here and there; and, as the sun slanted across it at one part, it seemed for the moment transfigured into such a silver stream as it might have been even there in the times when Chaucer did the customs' duties on its bank.

The select party walked round the landward sides of the Tower gardens, doing nothing else but observing from all external points of view, and commenting on the manner in which each new position from which they looked brought out this or that picturesque or historical attribute. Clement was keenly interested in the Tower, but probably still more interested in the task of pointing out all its peculiarities and beauties to his companions. They became free in a moment from all the meaner associations of the place. They thought nothing of the Minories or of Lower Thames Street, or of the cabstand on Tower Hill itself, or of the guides who importuned them as they passed the principal entrance with the re-

quest that they would inspect the Tower inside and see all the wonders. They were really absorbed in contemplation—in admiration of the Tower as it stands; not as a curiosity shop, but as a great historical building, made picturesque by its site and by its memories, even more, perhaps, than its material structure. But it would be rather too much to say that all the little party of four were equally interested. Melissa was neither interested nor pretended to be. She had come there simply because, little as she cared for the sight, she still less liked to be left at home by herself. She had told her companions that she only came because she did not choose to be left alone, and because, if anything was to be seen, she was not going to be what she called “out of the swim.” But she cared not much for the historical associations of the Tower. She cared, perhaps, still less for its appearance. She thought the moat a dreary, dirty old place; and her chief impression of the enterprise was that it was very monotonous walking round rusty old railings, and that the mud was particularly sticky, and very distressing when one had thin and pretty shoes and stockings. Yet it was destined that the expedition should prove to be of more interest to her than to any other of the party. As they were preparing to make another round of the railings, despite Melissa’s sad little protest and her eager demand to know whether they had not

seen enough of the old thing yet, they saw a man crossing Tower Hill who looked at them, and then made straight for them in so direct a way that it was clear he was about to claim acquaintance. There was no mistaking the man when he came a little nearer. Melissa forgot for the moment the Tower, the misty atmosphere, her personal fatigue, her hatred of historical buildings, the mud sticking to her shoes, and the chance of spoiling her stockings, when she saw that the new-comer was Mr. Montana.

Melissa was not the only one whose heart beat quickly when Mr. Montana came up and joined the party. Clement almost forgot for the moment the fact that his heart was broken by disappointed love in the surprise of keen interest which Montana's sudden appearance aroused in him. "Destiny—destiny itself," thought our young lover, "has brought me in his way just now. Here begins my rescue, my career."

Miss Marion did most of the talking on behalf of the select party. She explained the object of their visit to that region.

"I am here on different business," Montana said. "I am interested in an institution here—the Church of Free Souls. Let me walk with you for a little."

They could not walk all five abreast round the Tower. Clement could not venture to fall back with Melissa; he knew she did not want

him. Geraldine was determined that she would not walk alone with Montana, and she resolutely kept with Sydney; besides, Miss Marion and she were interested in the Tower, and wanted to have their attention directed to any new point which might have fresh interest. Clearly it was the duty of our young friend, since the party could not all walk together, to walk with the two young ladies who made his company welcome, and to whom he might be of positive assistance. He had come out as a guide, and they alone wanted to be guided. Naturally, therefore, Melissa fell behind; and as she fell behind Mr. Montana walked with her. She had never before exchanged more than the most formal words of conversation with him. She sometimes fancied that he regarded her merely as a little girl, with whom it was not necessary for a great man like him, occupied in a lofty mission, to exchange anything more than an occasional and ceremonious sentence. She was not usually given to embarrassment, nor at a loss to say straight out whatever she wished to put into words; but this time she was not merely embarrassed. At first she remained absolutely silent.

Montana had contracted the habit of silence, and he too for a while said nothing. But after they had walked a very few paces, it became apparent that if he did not speak neither would she, and that thus they must continue to pace round the Tower in silence. He therefore began:—

"I see you don't care much for the Tower, Miss Aquitaine. Do you care for old buildings or historical associations in general?"

"I do not care at all about them," Melissa answered in a faint voice, wondering herself to find how young she was, and with what trepidation she got the words out.

"You are right," Mootana said emphatically. "The time for living in historical associations is past. It is only the indolence of the mind that can busy itself or amuse itself in this way. We must live in the present and for the present. I am glad to think that that is your idea of life too."

Now, it is not certain that Melissa had any particular idea of life, or that she had ever made it her duty to live for the present any more than for the past or for the future. She had always lived in and for the present—that is to say, for herself; but it had never occurred to her that it might be one's theory of life to live in the present for other people. However, she had a flexible mind, and instantly assumed that such had always been her doctrine and purpose of life, and she accepted the implied sympathy which Mr. Montana's words conveyed.

"I am so glad you like my feeling," she replied, gaining courage and voice; "I do not see what we have to do with old buildings or with ruins. This is our time, is it not?"

Then he said, a little abruptly:—

“Living for the present, I suppose you make use of your life for the present?”

Melissa had not the least idea what he meant, but she was deeply impressed, and thought there was something prophetic in his manner.

“I am trying,” she said, “I shall always try. I should try all the more if I had any one to encourage me; but”—and then she stopped.

“Your people,” he said, “I suppose, do not think much of the great summons that calls on every one of us in life?”

“No, I don't think they do,” said Melissa, afraid to say much more lest it should plainly appear that she herself did not quite know what the summons was. But she felt more deeply impressed than ever with Montana's words. If he had gone deliberately about to make himself attractive to Melissa, he could not have taken any step more aptly fitted for the purpose than this way of at once addressing her as if she were a grave and responsible being, interested like him in the problems of life. Montana was not really thinking about Melissa. He was only, after his fashion, finding vague imposing sentences to express some general idea. If he had been desirous to captivate the little girl, it is not impossible that he might have gone about it in the usual way, by addressing to her some graceful compliments and conveying with his eyes the impression

that he admired her. That would have been powerless indeed, compared with the course he unconsciously took. He had lifted, as it seemed, poor little Melissa into his own atmosphere, into sympathy with him. She stood on the same plane with him; and metaphorically at least, they were hand in hand. To her it seemed as if for the moment they two were alone.

CHAPTER X.

CLEMENT'S EVENING WALK.

GERALDINE was very thoughtful all the evening after her excursion to Tower Hill. She was a good deal interested in Clement Hope, and somewhat touched as well as amused by his melancholy and his passion. She was sorry that Melissa did not care for him, and yet was inclined to think that it would not be well for the young man if she did.

It is superfluous to say that Geraldine was greatly interested in love-making of any kind. She had never as yet been herself in love. She had not even felt the schoolgirl's immemorial passion for the music-master or the drawing-master. She had had a great deal of admiration, and she often knew well enough that men were hinting love to her; and she had even had direct offers of hand

and heart, and so forth. But although she liked men in general, and some men in particular, she had never been brought to heart-throbs for any man as yet. The very fact gave her much of her ease and what might be called good-fellowship in the company of men.

She had lived in all her younger days a happy and a sheltered life. She was so deeply attached to her father, and had such a friend and companion in him, that she liked all mankind the better for him, and no one man in particular, for the same reason. Then came sorrow; and after the worst of the sorrow had passed away, a season of anxiety, not yet drawn to an end, in which money matters were a good deal mixed up. It was not even yet certain whether Geraldine and her mother were to be actually poor or not; whether Geraldine would not have to fight her way through the world by teaching or by such painting as she could do, or in some such way. Her mother was a very sweet but not very strong-minded woman; and the most of the thinking fell upon Geraldine. Her visit to Europe with Captain Marion's family was Geraldine's first holiday of any kind for some years. It was her first uprising after the prostration of grief and the long season of anxiety. It was like a convalescent's first drive in the open air. When she was leaving her American home her mother made one earnest request of her. "Darling, you are going to have a

holiday; now, let it be a holiday. Promise me that you will really do your best, your very best, to enjoy yourself; that you won't keep thinking of things that make you anxious, and that you will let yourself be happy with our friends." Geraldine promised, and was determined that she would do her very best to keep the promise. It was very, very difficult at first; but as the days went on it became easier and easier, and now in London Geraldine was really and truly enjoying herself. She had by nature a soul and spirit made for enjoyment; made to find happiness easily and to give it freely. She had health and strength, a splendid constitution, and high spirits. Perhaps her courage and elasticity of temperament might have made her even heedless and over-impulsive in her ways, if so much of her natural inclinations had not been curbed and made patient by a sudden sorrow and prolonged anxiety.

"I like your young friend very much," said Geraldine to Miss Aquitaine that same evening when they had returned to their home.

"What young friend?" asked Melissa languidly.

"Oh, come! you know; your hopeless Mr. Hope. I like him very much."

"Do you?" said Melissa. "I am very glad. I don't."

"I think he is a sweet boy," Geraldine declared.

"He is not quite a boy," said Melissa; "I

suppose he is four- or five-and-twenty. I think he is quite old enough to have more sense, and to know what he is going to do with himself. I think he is a very stupid boy, or man, or whatever you choose to call him—stupider even than men in general, if that were possible.”

“He seems to me very clever and full of promise. I should think he is a young man likely to make a name for himself in the world.”

“I wish he would make a name for himself,” said Melissa, “if he likes it; but what I object to is his trying to make a name for me.”

“I think you like him, after all, in the bottom of your heart,” Geraldine said, trying to find response in Melissa’s downcast eyes.

“If he comes here very often he will soon find whether I do or not,” was Melissa’s genial answer.

“How do you like Mr. Montana?”

Melissa remained silent, and Geraldine, fancying she had not heard the question, put it again.

“Mr. Montana,” Melissa said at last, “is a very different person from Clement Hope.”

“Yes, he is indeed,” Geraldine answered with emphasis, “*very* different. If I understand anything of men, I think Young Hope is a true man.”

“I don’t understand anything of men,” said Melissa, “and so I don’t know whether he is true

or false, but I don't regard Mr. Montana as an ordinary man, and I don't care to discuss him on the same level with Mr. Hope."

Somebody entered at this moment, and the conversation dropped. Geraldine was full of pity for Clement Hope, and not without a certain womanly anger for the scornful little maiden who thought so lightly of him and his love. She could not help wondering in her heart what it was that Clement Hope saw in Melissa to make him so completely her slave. "He seems such a fine noble young fellow," she thought, "with a good deal of the poet's soul in him, and after all there is nothing in Melissa. She has not much brains, and I don't think she has any tender feeling, she is a sort of girl who ought to be happy; she has everything she can want for herself, and she scarcely seems to think of anything but herself; she is safe against any chance of falling in love; and if she fell in love, it would not hurt her. Whatever is wrong with her, it can't be love." Geraldine suddenly remembered that there certainly was something wrong with Melissa. Her tears the other day were very genuine.

Meanwhile, Clement Hope was going home with his mind and heart all aflame. The incidents of the day might seem unimportant to others; they consisted for the most part of a muddy walk round three sides of the Tower, and an introduction to a gentleman from America: but they

seemed to Clement to promise a revolution in his whole conditions of being. He hardly found himself able to analyse his own emotions, to say what had become of old thoughts, and what was the meaning of the new ones that were coming up in their place. Clement really was what Mr. Aquitaine had described him, one of that class of mortals, very trying to all the world outside themselves, the poets who do not compose verses. His mind had for a long time been filled with his hopeless love for Melissa. Mr. Aquitaine had gauged very accurately the depth of his feelings on that subject. Melissa was the first pretty and graceful girl Clement ever had the chance of knowing, and he met her at a time when his fancy and his feelings were alike yearning for some one to fall in love with. A pretty servant-girl would almost have served his purpose if no more attractive woman had come in his way. Melissa's little rudenesses and saucy ways had naturally rather the effect of inflaming than chilling his love. He grew more and more into the conviction that she was the one being essential to his happiness, the one love for his life. He honestly believed that he was in love with her, and that he never, never could be in love with any other woman on earth. This idea he had nursed and humoured so long that all the strength and sweetness of it came to be added to the self-delight and self-torment of imagined passion. He had no serious hope of marry-

ing Melissa, and indeed, for the present, marriage was out of the question for him. Gratitude to the old man who had adopted him and made him a son rendered it impossible for Clement to think of taking any step in life which could have interfered with his home duties. Besides, to this young man, brought up modestly in the great northern seaport, the bare idea of his marrying a daughter of the house of Aquitaine seemed about as wild a fantasy as it would be, according to Major Pendennis, for young Arthur to dream of asking in marriage a daughter of one of the great houses into which his uncle kindly introduced him. Perhaps at this time of his life, and of his feelings also, it was rather gratifying than otherwise to Clement Hope to believe that he fed upon a hopeless passion. Despair is a great deal more soothing to the self-love of youth than hope. To believe oneself marked out by destiny for a ruined life tends very much to make the life itself pass meanwhile pleasantly. Clement was not conscious that he thus enjoyed his despair, but the enjoyment was there none the less.

In the midst of his conflict of emotions there rose upon his horizon the figure of Montana, as yet but a shadow to him. He heard of the great strange orator and leader from the new world, who was opening up an entirely fresh career to young men of promise and of soul. In a moment Clement became impressed with the conviction that

under the banner of Montana it was his duty to rank himself. Aquitaine had put it well. Montana and his new colony became the Saracens and the Holy Land of Clement's disappointed imagination. A few centuries before he would have longed to buckle on his armour and make his way into Syria to fight the infidel and obtain, if Providence were only kind enough, the glory of a warrior's grave. Now it seemed a special dispensation on his behalf which brought into light Montana's scheme for a new commonwealth, and sent Montana himself right across our young hero's path. Over all this conflict between the past and the future there was shed a certain soft kindly light which, although Clement then hardly quite knew it, undoubtedly shone from Geraldine Rowan's sympathetic eyes.

He had been introduced to Montana. He had spoken with the great man. The great man had taken kindly to him, and invited him to come and see him. The great man had looked at him fixedly, and Clement felt sure that Montana at that moment was putting him through a mental process of ordeal, subjecting him to a spiritual examination, just as a new recruit is tried by a physical test, and was examining into Clement's strength of soul, in order to decide whether he really was or was not a fitting disciple of the new movement. When, after this mental inspection, Montana spoke to him kindly and invited him to

call on him, Clement accepted the invitation as an acknowledgment that he was esteemed a welcome and a worthy recruit. Montana, indeed, had not been subjecting Clement to any such mental test; nor was he, after his usual fashion, engaged in thinking of something quite different while he looked fixedly at the person before him. He was thinking about Clement, and was greatly attracted by him. He was puzzling himself to think what young man he could ever have known who seemed to look like Clement, and how it came about that the face, the figure, and the eyes were so familiar to him—that they seemed to have been part of his own youth. He was greatly attracted towards Clement, and convinced that in him he would, indeed, find a valuable follower, a companion full of faith and courage. "Call for me on Sunday," said Montana, as they were parting, "and we will both go together to the Church of Free Souls."

Clement walked slowly home through the gathering evening. The evening was finer than the day had been, and the West was now glowing with all the richness that belongs to the sunset of a summer day that has been wet. Clement's way led him far from Piccadilly, whither he had conducted the young ladies to their home, and he walked all the way. It seemed to him as if he wanted all the time he could have for thought; for thinking over things, for thinking of himself and the new conditions that were growing around

him, of his disappointment and of his hopes. In truth, our young, verseless poet was very happy, if he did but know it. Perhaps no possible success in life and ambition and love could make any man so happy as Clement Hope might now have been in his ideal disappointment and his ideal prospects. The very sunlight drew for him a softer colouring from his poetic love-pain and his poetic hopes. Sometimes he was for a moment dimly conscious, as he loitered along, that the clouds driven to the east and the fires of the west, the grass and flowers of the parks, and the ripple of the water by which he now and then had to pass, were steeped in a new and special beauty for him, which made his disappointment seem easy to bear, and made the form of Melissa Aquitaine seem less distinct than it had been before. Although he did not then know it, one little star in his life's firmament was growing dimmer and dimmer, because another and a nearer and brighter, had now come up in the sky. Yes, that was a delightful, thoughtful walk home that evening for unhappy, very happy Clement Hope.

His way lay through Regent's Park; and he had to cross a bridge where once a certain Minola Grey, now Lady Heron, wife of the distinguished Colonial Governor, Sir Victor Heron, used to linger at quiet hours, when there were no loungers near. Clement stopped and leant on the railing of the bridge, and looked down on the ruffled water of

the canal. The face and the eyes of Montana seemed to look up to him out of the darkening water. He could not tell what had put this odd idea into his head; but whenever he looked fixedly into the water he seemed to see Montana's eyes looking up to his own. The impression was uncomfortable, uncanny; and Clement went his way, anxious to get rid of it. He was a poetic youth; poets, even only *en herbe*, must have their odd fancies.

Clement was going home to the house of the kind old man whom he called his father. The livery-stable keeper had long since given up all manner of business, and settled with Clement in a house not far from Primrose Hill. The old man was rich enough, and, except for Clement, had nothing to do with his money. He was leading a blank, half-puzzled sort of life, growing every day more and more into the conviction that he was to see his lost son again; growing only more eager to see him with every year that intervened between the present and the past. Much as he was attached to Clement, yet Clement's presence seemed only to keep alive all the more the memory of his son and the longing to see him. Although he had adopted Clement, and the young man called him father, he had never asked Clement to take his name. He was Edmund Varlowe, old Edmund Varlowe now; and there was once a young Edmund Varlowe, and that was all. There could not be

any young Edmund Varlowe but the one; so Clement Hope remained Clement Hope.

When he had crossed the bridge, Clement had not very far to walk before he reached Mr. Varlowe's house.

The house was an odd, old-fashioned building. It belonged, probably, in point of fact, to the early Georgian days, but it must have had an old-fashioned look even when it was built. Not that it could have had the appearance of an imitation of some older fashion, some modern-antique, some affectation of revivalism. Such affectations did not prevail in the somewhat dull but very simple and straight-forward days when its foundation-stone was laid. It was evidently one of those houses which have the peculiarity, as some girls have, of always looking old-fashioned even in their freshest days. If perchance some whim were to cause a revival of the precise period of the Georges to which this house belonged, the house itself would still look old-fashioned and even out of place beside the very neighbours which were supposed to reproduce the architectural peculiarities of its day. It was a solid block of a house, with rounded corners and two straight rows of windows above the ground floor, the ground floor itself only showing to the gazer's view a door with a semi-circular fanlight. On the roof was a round turret, with a little dome-like cap on it and a weather-cock. This might be an observatory, or it might

only have been the architect's idea of an ornament. The house stood alone, with a little patch of mournful-looking ground about it, and it was on the height of a gentle slope that drew back from the waters of the canal. There were many trees and much shrubbery in that region, to say nothing of the foliage of the adjoining park. One standing on the opposite bank, and looking across to the house, could sometimes, as it so happened, see no other human habitation whatever but this oddly constructed dwelling, and might fancy himself far away in the heart of the country, and gazing on some family mansion to which the owner was accustomed to travel down in the family carriage when the season for town was over, in the days when Mrs. Thrale was yet a saucy child, and before the "Vanity of Human Wishes" had been written. It was well worth spending a few moments on the spot from which the house could thus be seen, if it were only for the curious effect produced by the sight of the dull old dwelling, the observatory, the weathercock, the canal, the thick trees, and the absence of any hint or other human habitation. It did not tax the fancy of the gazer very much to suppose himself for the time transported not only out of London, but out of the century. When he had enjoyed that sensation long enough, he had only to walk a few paces either way, and he was in London and the nineteenth century again to his heart's content.

The effect was especially good when the evening began to fall. The house was one to be seen in the evening. There was a suggestion of age and even of decay about it which suited with dun evening clouds and "black vesper's pageants." Why should not Clement Hope feel a new interest in such a scene, familiar as it was to him, and in the odd effect produced by such a house in such a neighbourhood? Clement was only too much given to the half-sensuous enjoyment of any idle fancy, and he had often a good deal of time to throw away on such harmless, indolent delight. He lingered this evening, and looked long at the house, and took up positions from which fresh picturesque effects were got, and studied the scene as if he had not looked on it before. At last he made quickly for the house, and when he came to its railings and gate he saw that Mr. Varlowe was walking in the front garden.

The livery-stable keeper was falling fast into years. His hair was long and massed about his head; the hair was perfectly white; his moustache and beard were white; but he had lost hardly anything of his dignity of bearing, and he only stooped occasionally when he happened to have been for some long time sitting in his chair. He walked usually upright, with a soldierly, resolute air, and shoulders squared, and might have been indeed a very statuesque figure but for that curious appearance about the legs which belongs to men

the greater part of whose lives has been passed on horseback.

An odd sensation came over Clement as he opened the gate and saw the old man coming down the gravel walk. It was as if he had never seen Mr. Varlowe before, but suddenly began to be struck with the strange impression of a likeness to somebody he had seen elsewhere, and whose identity he could not now recall. Clement stopped in his walk up the garden, and looked with a curious half-puzzled air at the old man, exactly as one looks when caught by some impression of unexpected resemblance. The thought that passed across Clement's mind for the moment was that familiar thought, "Surely I have seen that face, or something very like it before," and then the momentary confusion became all the more confused in the recollection of the fact that it was the face he had been seeing every day since his boyhood.

"You seem puzzled a bit, Clem, my boy," Mr. Varlowe said; "what has gone wrong with you?"

"Nothing, father," said Clem; "only, as I came up, I could not help thinking that I had seen some one lately who reminded me of you, and I think you now remind me of some one I have lately seen."

"Like enough," said the old man; "a good many men of my age about London."

"But not a good many of your figure and face."

"Well, I don't know; there are some, anyhow; and the fewer there are, the more likely you would be to notice any one you chanced to see. But you have been a good long time away, Clem, and I have been mainly anxious about you now and then." Mr. Varlowe still retained a good many of his northern peculiarities of speech.

"I have been meeting a wonderful man," said Clem.

"Ay, ay? What is he like, now? and how does he come to be wonderful?"

"Well, he is a man who has a grand scheme for founding a new colony and beginning a new life out in America."

"I don't believe much in those new schemes," said the old man gloomily, "they seldom come to anything. What do you want leaving old England? Let her people stick to her, that's my idea. Let all people stick to their own soil while they can, Clem, my boy. Believe me, a man's never so happy as when he's at home."

"But all men can't stick to their own soil," said Clem, "and some have no home to keep to."

Mr. Varlowe looked at him anxiously. He sometimes began to be afraid that the young man's natural desire to see the world was oppressed by his confinement at home. "You are not one of

that sort, Clem, my boy," he said; "you have a home as long as you like to stay there."

"Oh yes," said Clem hastily. "I don't mean that. I was not thinking of myself. If everybody was as well off as I, there would be no use for new schemes and new colonies. But when you have been with a master mind like Montana, you get to think very little of yourself, and your own ways, and your own emotions, and you begin to see that people ought to work for others and think for others."

"You think for others, I am sure," said the old man; "you don't think much for yourself; you always think for me."

Clem felt a pang of remorse when he had to acknowledge to his own mind how small a part in his thoughts his fine old father had played for many and many an hour when compared with capricious little Melissa Aquitaine. This was the one secret he had not ever ventured on disclosing to Mr. Varlowe, and this he kept back only because he feared it would distress the old man by making him think that his adopted son must soon find new ties and new associations.

"Then, he is wonderful, this new man? Is he a lecturer or a preacher?"

"Well," said Clement, "he is a lecturer and a sort of preacher, but I have not heard him lecture or preach; it is the man himself who impresses me. I have only talked a few words with

him, but they made me feel as if a new life ought to be opening out to me, and as if I ought to be doing something great. I don't mean," he added quietly, "that I ought to be doing something great myself, or that I could be doing anything better than I am doing, but that there is a higher purpose in life when one gets out of one's own small concerns. He is a man who makes one feel ashamed of troubling himself about passing and personal affairs."

They were now walking up and down the gravel path. This was a favourite amusement of Mr. Varlowe. He liked to walk up and down in the evening leaning on the shoulder of his young supporter; not that the strong straight figure seemed to need much support; and although our youth was a fair stature, he stood considerably shorter than the elder man, who leant on him with a kind of affectionate semblance of weakness requiring to be upheld.

There was certainly something about Clement's look to-day which still puzzled Mr. Varlowe. The boy did not seem quite himself, he thought; there were alternate lights and shades crossing his face, as if some vexation had its turn occasionally, and was then succeeded by a new light of hope and of elated purpose. Mr. Varlowe had been so long a widower, and, never having had any daughters, had had so little to do with the affairs of women or their gossip, that it never occurred to him for

a moment to think it possible Clem's trouble might have been caused by some daughter of Eve. Clem, to his mind, was still only a boy, although a tall and strong boy, and Mr. Varlowe never dreamed that the lad might be in love. But he could see well enough that something was troubling Clem, and he felt uncomfortable at the idea of anything being hidden from him.

"Something is the matter with you," at last he said bluntly. "You seem distressed somehow. You are taking something to heart. Come, out with it, there's a good fellow. Let me know. You don't want any money, do you?" for in his puzzled moment he could think of no trouble that could come to young men unless the want of money.

"No," said Clem smiling, "I don't want any money; you always take care that I have enough of that. Indeed, nothing is the matter with me but that I have been talking to Mr. Montana, and that he makes me feel rather ashamed of my own life so far. I have been doing nothing. I think a man should have a purpose, even if he is not ambitious enough to want a career."

"Never want a career!" said the old man with energy. "Whatever you do, Clem, my dear boy, never want a career; never have anything to do with careers; careers are the ruin of boys. I know people who went heaven knows where be-

cause they fancied they ought to have careers. Don't do it, Clem; I hate careers. Whatever we talk of, let's hear no more of that."

CHAPTER XI.

"MUST NEEDS TO THE TOWER?"

IT would be superfluous to say that Clement Hope did not fail to call on Mr. Montana at the appointed time. Montana lived in one of the Piccadilly hotels. He had a handsome suite of rooms there, and appeared to live, according to the familiar phrase, "regardless of expense." Outside his door, on the first floor, waited a negro serving-man who had once been a slave, and who had afterwards fought in a black regiment of which Montana volunteered to take the command. The negro asked Clement's name, and on hearing it instantly showed him into a large reception-room. There Clement saw a man who appeared to be servant or attendant of some kind, lounging in a listless sort of way near a window which looked on Piccadilly and the park. This man was much younger than the negro; he was, in fact, a lad of about twenty. He was of a complexion and style of feature new to Clement. He had a sallow, dark-greenish, oily complexion, and long, lank, streaky hair. Clement assumed that he was a

foreigner of some kind, but ventured to address him in English. The young man replied in a kind of broken English, and with a sad, sickly smile intended to suggest a welcome. He explained to Clement that Mr. Montana would come in a moment, and that Clement was meanwhile to wait. Then the attendant, or whatever he was, fell back into the window, listless as before.

Clement looked round the room. It was furnished, of course, in the usual style of a West-End hotel, but there were a good many appointments added which spoke of the individuality of its present occupant. There were masses of papers, English and foreign, bluebooks, and reports, and one table was almost covered with unopened correspondence. On another table a sword was lying. Clement took it up, and with a sort of vague curiosity drew it from its sheath. The sword was dented in many places, and had engraved upon the blade the words "Fredericksburg, Gettysburg, Richmond." Many architectural plans, drawings, and even models were scattered about. On a smaller table in a recess was a careless heap of watches, jewelry, chains, trinkets of all kinds, and money.

Montana came in while Clement still had the sword in his hand. Montana entered the room slowly, with his usual demeanour, as one rapt in a reverie or a dream. He did not look at Clement till he was quite close to him, and then his face

lighted up with the sudden beaming smile which had fascination for so many of his admirers, and even went far to disarm his enemies. It seemed to have something special and personal in it. It seemed to say to the one on whom it lighted, "You are the person I specially wished to see. You are the person whose presence was most needed at this moment to my purposes and my hopes."

Clement's heart went out to meet this gracious smile. Montana held out his hand in a cordial fashion, and Clement pressed it almost with reverence. But, as Clement looked into Montana's eyes, the same kind of puzzled thought perplexed him which had seized him when he returned home that evening of which we have just spoken, and he saw Mr. Varlowe in his garden. "Have I not seen a face very like this lately?" was the thought. It so dominated Clement for the moment as positively to interfere with the cordiality of his reply to the friendly greeting of the great leader.

Montana turned to the attendant and said a few words to him in a tongue which Clement not only could not understand, but which bore no resemblance to any language with which he had the least acquaintance.

"He is a Red Indian," said Montana, "an Indian of the plains; the Forest Indians, the noblest of the race, are gone. I brought him away from the territory which, by an odd chance, has the

same name as myself. There was a massacre of the Indians in Montana, a massacre which they said was provoked by the Indians themselves, and I saved this lad. There was risk in it, but I did not care. He is devoted to me. He goes about with me everywhere. I shall not have him long."

"Why not?" asked Clement. He saw that Montana seemed to wait for a question.

"He will not live. He cannot live in civilization. The life of cities is fatal to the Indian, and this lad was sickly from his birth. Anyhow, the Red Indian does not get on in what are called civilised parts of the world, and the farther west you find him the less is he fit to breathe our fetid, unwholesome air."

"But I suppose," said Clement, "you will take him with you to the new colony?"

"The new colony," said Montana coldly, "cannot be built, or even begun, in a day; in the meantime, I fancy my poor lad must die. But I don't see much to regret in that. I don't take the common view of death. If there is no purpose in life I see no use in remaining in it."

Clement hastened to say that such was his own sentiment exactly.

"The man you saw at the door," said Montana, "I brought from down south. I got him away by what we used to call the 'Underground Railway' in those days, an organization by which we managed to enable slaves to escape into a

northern State. He was with me for a while in the war. I happened to save his life once—there was no risk in it to a man of my views, because I then did not care whether or not—but he chose to fancy he was mightily indebted to me, and he would not leave my service, I am sure, for a king's ransom. Well, let us not talk any more about myself, or yourself, or any individual man's trifling adventures."

Clement felt it almost like a rebuke to be thus invited not to talk any more about himself. He had not said a word on that subject, and indeed had said very few words of any kind. But he greatly honoured the loftiness of the principle which Montana enunciated. What did it matter, truly, how men like himself, or even men like Montana, felt or acted, while there was a great cause in the air? Yet he was glad that in the few words Montana spoke there had been even a casual, and of course unconscious, reference to Montana himself. It served to show what high purposes the great leader had, and what noble deeds of personal beneficence and bravery he must have accomplished. Then they talked about the Church of Free Souls, and the kind of work that was being done in the East End—work with which Montana professed much sympathy.

Montana moved towards the table where the letters stood, and placed a chair beside it for Clement, and invited him to sit. Montana him-

self sat on the other side, and took up some of the letters that were piled on the table. Begging Clement to excuse him, and not to consider himself in the way if he ventured to open some of them, Montana began to apply himself to the contents of a few.

Clement sat and listened and watched with devoted attention. He felt it a great thing to be thus admitted, as it were, to the private business life of the leader. Montana evidently treated him as one of a recognised band of followers, one admitted to know what the chief was doing, and even what he was thinking about. As he opened this or that letter he sometimes told Clement in a word or two what it was all about, and commented on its wisdom or its folly, its relevancy or its irrelevancy to the purposes he had in view. Suddenly Clement's eye fell upon the letter which lay next under Montana's hand. It was addressed to Montana in a woman's writing. Clement thought he surely could not be mistaken in that hand. Never, oh! never had letter or line been addressed to him by that hand, and yet he had seen it often and knew it well, and felt sure he could swear to it anywhere. The letter to Montana, he was satisfied, was addressed by the hand of Melissa Aquitaine. Probably it was some commonplace message, some ordinary invitation, some reminder of an engagement. Yet Clement would have longed to see any such missive addressed in

that hand to him. For a moment all his old love flashed up within him again. He felt that his cheeks were growing red as he waited, with a nervous anxiety which he could hardly conceal, for the moment when Montana should take up the letter, open it, and read it. Luckily for him, Montana did not appear to observe his embarrassment. Perhaps Montana was not in the habit of observing much that did not directly concern himself. Another moment, and Montana had the letter in his hand. Hardly looking at the superscription, he broke the seal and took out the enclosure. Whatever its subject, the letter was not a brief invitation, or formal reply, or reminder of an engagement; it was not a lady's mere line or two of civil request to a friend. Pages of manuscript were contained in that envelope. Was it possible Melissa Aquitaine could ever have been influenced by any sense of duty to pen so long a letter? It was impossible, Clement felt inclined to think, knowing what he did of the girl, and through all his absurd affection for her being fully conscious of her weaknesses and her ways. Yet, as he saw the writing, which he could not help seeing, he could less and less doubt that it was the hand of Melissa Aquitaine.

Montana glanced at the letter and threw it on the table. "There," he said to Clement, "is an illustration of one of our difficulties. We cannot work in a great scheme like ours without

the help of women, and yet we are every moment reminded how hard it is to work with them. Their emotions carry them so wildly away. I am for no scheme, in all my thought of the world's development, which does not keep women in their proper place, and make their impulsive natures subject to the discipline of man. They are great for work when they will do it, but they will follow any emotion, let it lead them where it will. This is a letter from a girl—she tells me she is a girl—who declares herself most anxious to aid hand and heart in our scheme, and yet, like a girl, she goes in a moment into a rhapsody of affection, and devotion, and extravagant love, and all the rest of it."

"Extravagant love!" The words went through Clement's heart. But if so, then it was not Melissa Aquitaine. He had been mistaken in the handwriting. "Strange!" he said aloud, and feeling at the same time a keen pang to think that none of this experience of woman's readiness to pour out her affection had as yet in any way found its path to him; to him who was so ready to receive it, so longing for it, come almost from where it might.

"Do you know the writer?" He held his breath for an answer.

"No," said Montana coldly. "I don't know the girl, but she tells me she will write again, and that she hopes some day to reveal herself to

me. If I knew her, I would tell her not to reveal herself to me. I have no time for such correspondence as this, and I don't want to know the woman who can turn aside from a great path to waste her energy in silly outpourings of love. I always have a great deal of that sort of thing. Every man has who goes into any great movement. It is one of our difficulties. The girl is clever, apparently, but she wants discipline. You may read her letter, if you like," and he tossed it over to Clement. "There is nothing personal in that sort of thing. Emotional girls must be in love with somebody, and they must be exposing their love."

Clement took the letter in his hand. He glanced over a page or two and then put it down, feeling as if he had done a mean act in even glancing at it, anonymous though it was. He could hardly have read it in any case. The characters swam and danced before him. Yet he saw enough to see that it was a wild outpouring of impassioned love, and frantic, almost servile devotion. The writer loaded Montana with words of affection and homage. There was love, love, love, repeated through every page. It never could be Melissa Aquitaine who wrote in this style; and yet Clement Hope felt it all but impossible to doubt that the writing he looked on came from Melissa Aquitaine's hand.

"There are women of a different kind," said

Montana, "women who could assist us and be a tower of strength to us, and we want some such women just now."

"You know of such women?" Clement asked half inarticulately. He did not very well know what he said, or why he said it. He wished to say something.

"I think I know of one. She hesitates a little yet, but she will not hesitate in the end. When work is appointed for men or women, the one for whom it is appointed must do it. Now," said Montana, rising, "we will go to the East End; I will show you the Church of Free Souls, and we will talk over our plans as we go. Do you like to walk?"

"I am very fond of walking."

"I am a great walker," said Montana, "and I don't care about a carriage when I can avoid it. I like to be no better than my neighbours."

They set out for the Church of Free Souls. It was a long walk, and Montana talked a good deal more than was usual with him. He appeared to be pouring confidences into Clement's ears, and yet Clement did not seem to arrive at any particular knowledge of what he was going to do. He heard a great many maxims and phrases which for the time impressed him; and he saw Montana now and again recoil from some explanation, and seem to shelter himself in a sort of cavern of profound thought. In truth, it must be confessed that Clement remained, as regards Mon-

tana's general organization and immediate purposes, about as wise as he had been before.

"You, at all events," Montana suddenly said, "will work with us. I knew that from the first."

"I will work with you all I can," Clement answered with some hesitation, fearing lest the answer might lower him in the leader's eyes; "but I have told you of my father. I cannot leave him. I cannot go out with you just yet."

"We are not going out just yet," said Montana, "nor could I ask you to disregard your father's wishes. You can help us here as well as there. The true follower can help anywhere. Above all things, you must have faith. You must trust in me and follow me. I may not yet be able to tell you all I mean to do. But you must believe in me, even if sometimes you have to follow me in darkness."

Some words which the old livery-stable keeper had often read to him came involuntarily up in Clement's mind: "He who followeth Me shall not walk in darkness." But he did not venture to apply them to the present hour and the present leadership, and he thought it all right and proper that Montana should not reveal his whole scheme and organization at once. Besides, this proposed reticence fully accounted for a certain previous vagueness in Montana's descriptions, and made darkness itself clear—that is to say, explained to Clement why Montana did not explain himself.

The denial of a full confidence from the leader only made the follower's confidence all the fuller.

While leader and follower are on their way to the Church of Free Souls, we may say that that institution was a new church or temple which had suddenly arisen in London. It was not new in the sense of being a modern structure. Indeed, it was one of the very oldest buildings in the very old quarter where it stood. I had gone through many changes. It had been a Quakers' meeting-house, a Presbyterian place of worship, a corn store, a music-hall or singing saloon, and now it was converted back again to something of its original purpose by becoming the Church of Free Souls. It was made all the more attractive to the curious from distant parts because it was so difficult to get at. It stood in one of those mazes of little streets which run off Tower Hill, and from which every now and then you get glimpses of the round-topped turrets and weathercocks of the Tower itself, with occasionally, on a clear day, a flash of the Thames and of the Pool below. The Church of Free Souls had been for some time in the occupation of a sect of very advanced Dissenters verging on to free thought. Under their rule it had, however, its regular forms of worship, not unlike those of any other Nonconformist chapel. But suddenly it had passed into the care of a minister who himself had wandered forth from the Church of England itself, on and on, away and away, into ex-

treme freedom of opinion. Under his inspiration the Church of Free Souls grew into existence. He was an eloquent man, had been a very fashionable preacher in the West End in his time, and the mere fact of his having migrated thus far eastward, and settled himself in the midst of the Minorities, and almost under the shadow of the Tower, would have been enough to lend attraction to a new ministration, and to draw a crowd.

Gradually crowds were drawn to the Sunday services, and at certain times it was difficult indeed to get a seat there. There were no pews or divisions or inequalities of any kind. It was a question of first served. You sat where you could; you paid nothing for your seat, and might give to the collection afterwards if you felt inclined, or abstain from giving if your sympathies did not take a practical form. The church was now handsomely painted and decorated inside, and was hung with pictures, not professing any great accuracy as likenesses, to represent all the eminent religious persons of all the creeds in the world, except the orthodox. There were Zoroaster, whose portrait we may suppose to have been a fancy likeness, and Confucius, and Socrates and Mahomet, and John of Leyden, Hypatia and Joanna Southcott, and many other leaders of sects or peoples, and eminent public men and women who had supported new movements of various kinds. The doctrine taught in the Church of Free Souls was distinctly

eclectic in its nature. It was in some sort a principle of religious averages. It assumed a certain portion of truth and a great deal of philosophy in all faiths everywhere, and it struck a kind of average, and so got, or professed to get, a certain profit out of all together. The preacher usually declined to offer any set opinions of his own, and simply called attention to the "flower of good," according to his own habitual expression, which "blossomed in every faith." He was imperial, and disdained to attribute any superiority to one over another. On the other hand, he positively declined to see any particular advantage in any of them, but, culling some leaves from every plant, he offered them to his congregation that they might infuse all together, if they thought fit, and so make a sweet kind of syrup of their own brewing for the nourishment of the soul.

The minister in charge of this temple was as liberal with his pulpit, or we should say his platform—for he disclaimed and contemned the use of a pulpit—as he was with his religious opinions. He offered the advantages of an audience and a platform in his temple to any remarkable person who came in the way and desired an opportunity of addressing such a crowd. Many an eminent stranger, who in his own country would as little have expected to be invited to address a congregation as to figure on the tight-rope, found himself, on arriving in London, favoured with a grace-

ful invitation to communicate some thoughts on spiritual matters to a yearning congregation desirous for all forms and moods of truth in the Church of Free Souls, near Tower Hill. The audience that gathered there were naturally eclectic, not to say motley, in their constitution, as were the doctrines to which they came to listen. Great ladies from the West End came in their carriages, and were interested in the whole affair almost as much as if it were Hurlingham or the Zoological Gardens. Strangers of almost all sorts came, regarding the church as one of the sights of London which ought to be seen. It had been described over and over again by the correspondents of all the American papers from New York to San Francisco. Numbers of eager-eyed mechanics from the East End came and sat there and listened earnestly, hoping to hear something which might fill them with better and brighter views of life than those which they could evolve from their own dull, hard daily experience. Young men and young women from a class just one degree above that of the artisan; young men and young women probably who assisted in the poorer kind of shops, and who were noticed among their fellows for their sober ways and the intense anxiety with which they looked at all the problems of life; these formed a goodly part of each Sunday's congregation. Some deeply thinking men and women came there with a faint hope that they were about to hear

something which really might open on them a new view of the relations of life, and they went away for the most part disappointed.

It was a long way to the Church of Free Souls. Clement had not been there before, but he remembered having seen Montana come to meet them when the girls and he were walking round the Tower garden, and it did not seem to him now that Montana was taking the shortest way to bring them to the place. At least, Montana now certainly brought Clement on to Tower Hill by a way which appeared to Clement to take them a little out of their road, and which did afterwards in fact oblige them to retrace their steps. When they came to Tower Hill, Montana crossed the road to the path round the railings, and there began to pace slowly along with Clement, very much as Clement had done with Geraldine and Miss Marion on the memorable day when he first saw Montana. Not many days had passed since that day, and yet it seemed to Clement that already an entirely new chapter had opened in his life. They walked round and round by the railings, Montana talking sometimes in his vague oracular way, and sometimes remaining silent for several minutes.

Suddenly Montana said, without looking at Clement, and talking as if he were communing with himself; "Yes, there are women who could assist a work such as mine."

Then, looking round at Clement, he asked, "Have you known Miss Rowan long?"

There was a tone of unwonted eagerness, or at least something remotely approaching to eagerness, in the question, which was unlike Montana's usual way of speaking.

"Oh no," said Clement, and he felt that his colour was deepening, "I saw her for the first time within the last few days."

"But you have known Miss Aquitaine for some time?"

Clement had much difficulty in keeping an unembarrassed manner when he answered that he had known Miss Aquitaine and her father for a long time.

"She has not the same force of character," said Montana. "She is not a woman to create a career for a man. But perhaps you think she is?" he suddenly said, changing his tone, and looking at Clement with a not unkindly smile.

"No," said Clement, with a sudden earnestness which was forced from him, "I don't think anything of the kind."

He did not, indeed, think so any more.

"Come," said Montana, "it is time for us to go to the Church of Free Souls. It is not far from this;" and they went their way at once, and no other word was spoken until they reached the place.

CHAPTER XII.

"THE DESIRE OF THE MOTH FOR THE STAR."

HOW was it with Melissa Aquitaine when an air ground out on a barrel organ could bring tears into her eyes—she who had never been supposed to know one touch of sentiment? The air that now moved her thus, and made her put down her pen as she sat writing in her room, was not a dirge, or a sad appealing hymn, or a piece of melancholy music of any kind. It was the air of a comic song, a vulgar-music-hall song. We are strangely apt to fancy that melancholy sensations are wrought only by music that is melancholy. To the vast majority of people, the feeling that music inspires is far more often one of association than of art. Something suggested by the air, some connection which is in our memory with past time or a lost friend it is, and not the nature of the strain, which touches our heart, and strikes "the electric chain wherewith we are darkly bound." The village lad enlists and goes to the war, and is killed, and his sweetheart is made melancholy for years after by the first sound of "Tommy, make room for your uncle," on the barrel organ, because he used to whistle it, and he is dead. The young wife who died long ago used to amuse her husband by rattling off on the piano the inspiring notes of "Cham-

pagne Charley," and the Charley of that day, now grown a middle-aged man, is made instantly melancholy by the sound of that ridiculous air, although he could hear without outward sign of emotion the most devotional passage of the sublimest oratorio, or the soul-piercing pathos of "*Che faro senza Eurydice*." It so happened that a common music-hall ballad now touched Melissa's heart and made her eyes wet. It was some ballad that she suddenly remembered having heard her nurse sing for her in days long ago, that now seemed to her long ago, when she was still a child; days not particularly delightful or romantic in themselves; but still, days when nothing troubled her; and now something was troubling her. She used to be a disagreeable little child enough in those days; and the possibility that she had been so began now to occur to her somehow. She began to doubt whether she had been exactly all that she might have been to those around her. New feelings coming up within her were beginning dimly to reveal to her the possibility of other people having feelings too—a matter which had not previously occurred to her mind. She was unhappy, poor little girl; and the air she heard grinding itself out on the barrel organ spoke to her of a time when she never thought of either herself or any one else being unhappy. So she put down her pen for a few moments and felt the tears come into her eyes.

"What a fool I am!" she said bitterly and aloud, and she went on with her writing again. She wrote in a hurried way, rapid by fits and starts, and then stopping for a long time to think over what she was to say next, and tearing up a good deal of what she wrote, and thrusting the torn scraps into the pocket of her dress, as if she would not have even those fragments seen of common eye. She was so much absorbed in her work that she did not hear the sound of a quick, light tap at the door, and then the opening of the door itself. Her father quietly entered the room. As she had not heard him, he would now surprise her by his coming. He stole behind her chair and put both his hands over her eyes.

Melissa cried out at once, "Papa!"

"How did you know it was I?" Mr. Aquitaine asked, setting Melissa's eyes free to look out upon the world, which they did at that moment with a somewhat startled look in them.

"Oh, I knew the touch of your hands very well; and besides, there was nobody else who would come in such a way."

She did not seem, he thought, as glad to welcome him as he usually found her, and she hurriedly shut up the blotting-book in which she had been writing.

"What have you been doing, Mel?" he asked, after having given her a loving kiss.

"Oh, nothing, dear," she said, "nothing."

"Something, surely. What have you got in your book? What have you been writing?"

She got up petulantly, opened the book, took a sheet of paper out, and began to tear it in pieces. Mr. Aquitaine was looking on with perfect good humour, and did not even appear to notice the anger that was in her face.

"I do believe, Mel," he said, "you have taken to writing poetry; come, confess you were trying your hand at verses; do let me have a look."

"No," said Melissa, still with an embarrassed air, "I was not writing poetry. I can't write anything worth looking at."

"An essay on woman's rights, perhaps? I should like very much to have a look at it."

"You know I don't care about woman's rights," said Melissa, "or woman's wrongs either."

"Well, I never thought you did much; but one doesn't know what may have come about lately under the guidance of Montana."

Melissa looked up at him, a sudden light of wonder in her eyes, and then she looked down again.

"No," she said, "I have not advanced in woman's rights any farther than I was."

"Then," said Aquitaine, "it must be a novel. You are beginning a novel. It is something or other about which you don't feel quite certain, and you are afraid to have it seen by any one while it is yet a project. Never mind, girl; I

know they say children and fools should never look at unfinished work, and so I shan't ask to look at yours. But I have no doubt it will be something remarkable when it does come out. Only, if it is going to be a very long piece of work, don't you know, Melissa, I think you'll never finish it."

"Do you think I am meant for the early and silent tomb?" said Melissa, with an attempt to be lively

"No, not a bit of it; but I think you are a very lazy and capricious little girl, and that whatever you begin you certainly won't finish, if it is to be more than a page. If that were a letter, now—I dare say you could finish a letter, provided it were not too long; but I despair of your ever getting as far as the middle of the first volume of a romance. Besides, I don't know what you would do for a hero. I don't believe anybody is a hero in your eyes, not even I myself, Mel. Come, confess you don't think me an heroic figure."

"Girls don't want heroic figures for their fathers," said Melissa.

"No, I suppose they don't. It would be rather uncomfortable to have an elderly hero always hanging about the house, would it not? But you have a hero, then, for your love romance?"

"I am not doing any love romance," said Melissa. "How can you be so tiresome?"

"Very well, girl, let it be," said the good-natured Aquitaine: "just now I want you to do some less attractive business; I want you to come with me and make one or two calls."

Melissa moved uneasily about the room, and still seemed distressed as to the fate of the torn paper which she held crumpled in her hand.

"You haven't got a waste-paper basket," said Aquitaine, "and don't know what to do with your rejected MS. My dear, you must start a waste-paper basket instantly if you are going in for the business of writing; you will find nothing so important as the waste-paper basket, and it will be just as well you should fill it yourself in anticipation, and so save the editors and publishers the trouble; they will do it if you don't."

"I haven't a waste-paper basket, and there isn't a fire, and the thing is neither worth destroying nor keeping." Nevertheless, she did not throw away the paper that she held in her hand. "Very well, dear," she said; "if we are to go out, I shall be ready in a moment."

"In a moment!" Mr. Aquitaine echoed. "Very well; I will read a few of the newspapers. I have not begun them this morning, and your moment will give me time for a good steady read through the lot of them." He took a newspaper and settled himself down. Melissa meanwhile crept out of the room in the quietest way, eager to get to her own chamber.

Mr. Aquitaine was too unsuspicious a man to be roused to any sense of distrust, even by the girl's evident embarrassment. He took it for granted that she had been writing some letter which she did not care to finish when once she was interrupted, and he did not really fancy that she was starting on the business of authorship. A man more keen-eyed than he might have thought that there was something in the girl's evident determination not to part with the torn paper she held in her hand. But even if Aquitaine had suspected what she was doing, or had insisted on seeing it, it is not likely that much change would ultimately have been made in the conditions with which this story has to deal. Melissa was a resolute little person, sure to have her own way in the end, and to walk whatever road she marked out for herself, no matter to what goal it conducted.

On her rapid way upstairs Melissa literally ran against Geraldine Rowan. Her excitement and agitation did not escape Miss Rowan's notice.

"Whither are you flying, and what have you got in your hand, you breathless child?" Geraldine said, playfully holding the girl; "what torn document is that?"

"I don't know," said Melissa, "and I don't care. I wish every one would not frighten and torment me. What is it to anybody what I write

or whom I write to? I am not sending it, anyhow—there!” and she tore the paper into scraps ever so much more minute than she had done in her first excitement, and then she burst into tears.

“Something is going terribly wrong with you, my dear little girl,” Geraldine said; “and I am a very determined friend, Melissa, when I want to be a friend at all. Come to my room, or I will go to yours; let us talk for a moment or two. I will not ask you to tell me anything if you don’t wish; but if you could at all bring yourself to make me your confidante, I think it would be good for you. I am a very faithful friend, and I know that something is troubling you lately that you want to conceal. Why don’t you speak to your father?”

Melissa was now allowing herself to be led quietly along the passage towards Geraldine’s room. She made no answer, and was only trying to prevent her sobs from being heard. They got into the room, and Geraldine carefully closed the door.

“Why not speak to Mr. Aquitaine, Melissa?” she said; “he seems to me to be the best of fathers and the best of good companions. I should tell anything to such a man if I were you.”

“I have nothing to tell,” Melissa murmured, still making a feeble effort to keep up her defiant manner.

"But such a change has been coming over you that everybody can see—everybody, I think, but Mr. Aquitaine; people never notice their own family. Girls don't burst into tears at being asked what they have written without some reason for it. Besides, I can see that something is distressing you. Will you tell Mr. Aquitaine, or will you let me ask Captain Marion to speak to him?"

"No," said Melissa, "nobody shall speak about me to anybody. I don't choose to be spoken about. If I have anything to tell I will tell it myself, but I could not talk to my father about it, Geraldine. How can you speak in such a way? I cannot talk to him. I cannot talk to anybody about it."

"Then, there is something!" said Geraldine quietly.

"Oh, of course there is, if you will have it, if you will insist upon it. Of course I know you have been wondering about this for ever so long. Well, there *is* something. I am a very silly girl, that everybody knows; and I have been making myself more silly of late than I do believe even Providence intended to make me. Look here—yes, I think you are a true friend, and I like you—or, I don't hate you; not more, at least, than I hate most people, as I do. I don't like you, perhaps, although I said I did just now; still, I don't hate you more than I hate everybody. I like you better than the rest of them, than—I

don't know what. Yes, I will tell you. I have been——" Then she stopped. She looked curiously into Geraldine's face, and said, "I wonder what you will think of me when I tell you? and I wonder what a girl like you, with a well-regulated mind, is likely to say?"

"But, my dear," said Geraldine, "I have not a well-regulated mind; I am always so impulsive, so foolish, and speaking out my mind too freely; and talking to everybody as though I were his, her, and their friend, and altogether comporting myself in the most gushing manner. I am not at all a girl of a well-regulated mind. Sydney Marion is, if you come to that. She has a well-regulated mind, but I should not expect you to rush into confidence with her. I rather appeal to you by virtue of the sacred bond of sisterhood of the ill-regulated."

Geraldine was endeavouring to make the matter as light and easy as she could.

"Well, then," said Melissa, "I am in love; that's all."

"I thought as much; but is that all?"

"No, that is not all," said Melissa, "if you will have it: I am in love with a man, and I have told him so."

"You have not written to him to tell him so?" said Geraldine.

"Haven't I, though?" Melissa asked, growing defiant and saucy in her despair. "You bet, as

all you Americans say—don't they all say 'you bet'?—well, then, you bet I have; yes, I wrote and told him so."

CHAPTER XIII.

ELECTIVE AFFINITIES.

THERE was silence between the two girls for a moment or two after Melissa had made her revelation. The dusk of evening was gathering; the air was soft; Geraldine's windows were open; the footfall of passengers echoed along the street; and the sound of the barrel-organ, which had touched Melissa's sensibility not long before, was still heard in the room, "faint from farther distance borne." Geraldine could hear distinctly the beating of Melissa's heart, as she sat close to the troubled girl. She could also hear the faint ticking of the pretty little clock that stood on the chimney-piece; an old whimsical fancy came into her head that the little pit-pat of the pendulum ought to represent the beating of the absent lover's heart, keeping time and tune to the throbs of Melissa's enamoured bosom. Geraldine assumed that it was an ordinary love affair, but that perhaps the youth required some little direct encouragement from the maiden. She was conscious even then, and she remembered

it well afterwards, of a certain sense of relief in the knowledge that it was not Clement Hope on whom Melissa's uncontrollable affections were fixed. "She would never do for him," Geraldine thought; "she hasn't soul enough; she's too petulant; she couldn't make him happy."

Geraldine was sorry for Melissa and angry with her too. But she was not at first much alarmed by Melissa's disclosure. It did not occur to her to think who the person could be to whom Melissa had made her confession of love, and she was more inclined to be amused than shocked.

"Is this any one," she asked, "whom your father would like?"

"I don't know," said Melissa coldly. "I have not consulted my father."

"But, won't your father expect to be consulted?"

"I don't think my father would care to be consulted about his daughter making a fool of herself and writing a silly letter to a man."

"But the man will answer the letter, won't he? He must speak to your father or to you."

"He won't answer my letter," Melissa composedly answered, "because he doesn't know my name."

"Oh—then you didn't sign it? You didn't write in your own name?"

"No," Melissa answered in a dismal tone, "I

did not get so far as that—but I dare say I shall some day.”

“Well, you are a very dreadful little girl, Melissa, and that is the truth of it. I hope you won’t get so far as you say. I hope you will be content with your anonymous outpouring of homage. But I should like to know who the man is, if I might—if you don’t mind telling me; and I think, as you have trusted me so far, you might trust me a little farther perhaps.”

“What good will it do you to know?”

“Well—only this, that I think I could better judge whether this humour is likely to last with you or not, and whether *he* is likely to find out his mysterious admirer, and whether it would matter if he did. Is he a very young man?”

“No.”

“He is not a very old man, I suppose?”

“No; he is not old, and he is not young, and he might be any age. I wish I had never seen him. No, I don’t. I’d rather not have lived than not seen him.”

Geraldine really began to think from the girl’s manner that things were looking serious. “Have I ever seen him?” she asked.

“You go on,” said Melissa, “as if this was a game of Twenty Questions; and it isn’t. Yes—you have seen him; and he has seen you; and I wish he had not.”

"Why do you wish that?" asked Geraldine, astonished.

"Demetrius loves your fair," said Melissa, "'oh happy fair!'" With all her ignorance and her indifference to reading, Melissa, as we have already seen, had a little knack of picking up a Shakespearian quotation and employing it prettily enough.

"This is mysterious," Geraldine said. "Well, if I had any influence over him, I am sure I would make him over to you with all my heart. But I cannot imagine who he is; we know so very few men—I mean, you and I know so very few together. I know it isn't Mr. Hope, and I know it isn't Mr. Fanshawe."

"Stuff!" said Melissa contemptuously. "Think of Mr. Fanshawe!"

"Well, I do think of Mr. Fanshawe; I think very kindly of him, but I know it is not he—I suppose it isn't Captain Marion?"

"Not likely!" said Melissa.

"Then, I give him up," said Geraldine, "and there's an end of it; for I have gone through all our list of acquaintances."

Melissa's face bore such an expression of surprise, and something like contempt, that a light seemed to come from her into Geraldine's mind.

"Melissa," she said, "you don't mean Mr. Montana?"

"Don't I, though?" Melissa replied. "But I just do. I am in love with him; madly in love

with him, if you like—there! I have told you all. Laugh at me if you please, or scold me, or pity me; it is true all the same; I am glad I have told you; I must have told somebody, or I should have screamed it out in the night. I have written him love-letters—grovelled before him. Oh! what will he think of me if ever he finds out?”

“But he must never find it out,” said Geraldine. She had turned pale; the thing was serious.

“Oh, he will find it out,” said Melissa. “Some day I shall betray myself; I cannot help it. I wish I had been a better girl. I wish I had learnt to think more of what people say—and all that! I wish I had cared for saying prayers—and—and that sort of thing.”

Poor Melissa did not mean to speak irreverently; but her turn of expression was touching in the very simplicity of its irreverence. She could think of no other words at the time.

“Prayers and that sort of thing!” said Geraldine.

“Yes, anything you like. I suppose you can pray? My mother does not care about prayers, and that sort of thing. She never did. My father is too busy. I suppose men don’t pray. Anyhow, I wish I were like another girl. Oh, how I wish I were like you, for one reason above all others.”

“I don’t know any reason,” said Geraldine. “I haven’t a father, and I haven’t a home.”

“No,” said Melissa, standing up and clenching

her little hands; "you have not. But Mr. Montana cares about you a hundred thousand times more than he ever did or will care about me—that I know."

Geraldine was really pained by these wild words. She was deeply sorry for Melissa; but now there began to mingle with her concern for Melissa a certain vague undefinable sense of alarm about herself. Mr. Montana's manner had from the first been unwelcome to her; and if others saw it as well as she, if others had the same impression forced upon them, if a girl like Melissa could see it, how distressing it must be to be brought continually into a sort of companionship with Montana? Always there had seemed something ominous to Geraldine in her relationship with him. She was not afraid of him as others were, or impressed by him and his strange manners and his singular beauty. But there was something uncanny in the manner in which his shadow seemed always to be thrown across her path. Her first thought on hearing Melissa's words was a longing to go away somewhere, anywhere, out of Montana's range; and then came back to her the more reasonable thought that she had better stay where she was and try to help Melissa out of her difficulty, and if possible help her to cure herself of her foolish passion. She went to work resolutely to reason with the girl, but did not seem to make much impression.

"Let me alone," said Melissa at last; "advising is never any good with me, nor arguing, nor scolding. It was always my way, the more I was pressed not to do a thing, the more I wanted to do it. You can't keep me back, Geraldine, from doing anything that comes into my mind. I could not keep myself back. I will try to keep out of this as long as I can, but some day I shall either write it or I shall speak it. I shall not be able to keep it in; and I suppose he will rebuke me and preach me a sermon and tell my father all about it, and Captain Marion will shake his head over me and think what a bad girl I am, and what good girls his daughters are—although I don't know that, either; I fancy one of them, at all events, is nearly as far gone as I am myself. But anyhow you will all be ashamed of me, and I shall be ashamed of myself. But I am in love with him all the same, and he must come to know it, and that's all about it."

There was not much use in saying more on the matter just then. Melissa's words about Montana and her hints about some one else as well as herself, made Geraldine unwilling to mention his name again.

"Now I hope I have shocked you enough for once," Melissa said coldly, "and I'll go. I had better get the redness out of my eyes, hadn't I, before dinner? You can tell on me, Geraldine, if you like; you can tell my father, or Captain

Marion, or Sydney, or anybody. I should fancy it would be the duty of a good girl to tell such a thing to a wicked girl's parents, but I am not a great authority on the subject. Do as you like; I don't much care."

"You dreadful little thing! you know I'll not betray you," Geraldine answered. "I don't know that I am not doing wrong; I don't know that I ought not to tell your father; but I won't. You trusted me, and I'll keep my trust. But oh, my poor child, how I wish you would speak to your father. Oh, when I had a father——"

"Yes," Melissa said, "I dare say!" She was going away scornfully; but something in Geraldine's expression seemed to strike her. She turned back and took Geraldine's hand gently, and asked in a low tone, "Will you kiss me, Geraldine?"

Geraldine took the little palpitating girl in her arms and kissed her.

Montana was a constant visitor at Captain Marion's house. He never missed a day. He came and went when he pleased. Sometimes, but not often, he dined and met people there; his habit, however, was to come in early in the day and before any ordinary visitor was likely to arrive. He was a good deal with Captain Marion, who still remained under the impression that he was getting to know all about Montana's schemes. He hardly ever failed to look into the drawing-room and see some of the young ladies.

With all Captain Marion's admiration and reverence for his friend and possible leader, he could not help feeling that Montana's visits had strangely changed the atmosphere of the house. He was always glad to see Montana; and the singular fascination with which Montana had impressed him from the first in no wise diminished, but rather increased, from the frequency of their intercourse. But Captain Marion could have wished sometimes that the women were out of the way. Montana's coming and going acted strangely upon all of them. Katherine admired him in the most open way, flattered him, hung upon his utterances—followed him about, one might say, almost like some faithful animal clinging to his master's heels. Captain Marion did not like this. It puzzled him; it sometimes irritated him. His soft, affectionate, unsuspicious ways did not allow him to think that Katherine was trying to get up a flirtation with the prophet and leader, and indeed Montana's position of the prophet and leader made it easy for women to offer any adulation to him without suggestion of levity. Yet Marion did not like to see his daughter thus openly devoted to Montana. He thought there was something at least unladylike, not to say unwomanly, about it. He wondered Trescoe did not notice it; was sometimes glad he did not notice it, and sometimes thought it rather weak and silly that Trescoe did not see it and talk to her seriously and put a stop to it. On

the other hand, the coming of Montana either sent Miss Rowan out of the room or condemned her to absolute silence. She clearly disliked and distrusted Montana as much as Captain Marion's younger daughter believed in him and adored him. This, too, made Captain Marion uncomfortable. He was very much attached to Miss Rowan. He was always happy to have her near him. He would have wished her to like everything he liked, to love all that he loved, to have the same tastes, inclinations, and tendencies as he had. It distressed him to find that she shrank from Montana so openly, and to all appearance disliked him so much. He wondered that Montana was not repelled by it. He was afraid sometimes that Miss Rowan's manners might lead Montana to come less often.

Again and again Marion was on the point of remonstrating with both young women—with Geraldine for her repelling manner to Montana, and with Mrs. Trescoe for her too open admiration. Then, he could not but observe with pain the strange ways of Melissa Aquitaine, about whom he felt an almost greater sense of responsibility than if she had actually been his daughter. Her whole nature seemed changed since Montana came above the horizon of their little world. She crept into corners when he was there, and scarcely spoke, but started or grew pale, or looked angry or alarmed according as others spoke and he spoke to them. She who had been such an

audacious, outspoken, pert little chatterbox was sometimes changed into a melancholy, bitter, broken-down creature. How Montana failed to notice that something was amiss with the little girl whenever he came into the room Captain Marion failed to understand. Marion himself was anything but an observant man. His sympathies and not his observation guided him in this instance. When he cared about anybody, man or woman, he was sure to observe that person's movements closely and kindly, and thus it was that he came to notice the strange ways of his old friend's only daughter. But Montana, who had keen observation when he chose, had no such sympathies to guide him, and he hardly ever noticed the little girl whose odd ways disturbed Captain Marion. To make matters worse, Katherine was always saying spiteful little things to her father about Melissa, and suggesting that Melissa was madly in love with Montana and was making an exhibition of herself.

One day Marion lost patience a little.

"I tell you what, Katherine," he said, "I don't think little Melissa is the only woman in this house who sometimes makes an exhibition of herself. I think if I were you I wouldn't show such awful admiration for Montana."

Katherine got red and looked angry, but concealed her anger.

"Why, papa," she said, "you are awfully

fond of him—you adore him. I like to do whatever you do."

Marion smiled in spite of himself at the absurdity of the answer.

"That's all very well, Katherine," he said, "for me; but for a young woman to go on showing such admiration is quite another thing. I wonder how Trescoe likes it."

"But Frank doesn't care a bit," said Katherine. "He knows it's all right."

"Yes, yes, of course, we all know it's all right," said Marion; "but, my dear, don't you think it would be better to be a little more reserved? I don't wonder at your admiring Montana. He is a man that every one must admire—at least, almost every one," he hastily added, for he remembered how Miss Rowan did not seem quite to admire him. "But then, you know, I think it would be more ladylike to be a little more reserved. After all, Montana is not an old man. He is still what would be called young, and he looks younger than he really is, and he is very handsome."

"But then, you know, papa," said Katherine, "one does not think of him as one does of other men; nobody thinks of flirting with him. I am sure I don't; I am sure I should not have the courage. One might as soon think of flirting with John of Leyden or with some saint."

Marion said no more, but he observed that the adulation went on as much as ever, and that it did not seem to be just the sort of adulation which a woman offers to a John of Leyden or to a saint. However, he was sure there was nothing amiss with Katherine, he said to himself, and Montana was the safest of men. Montana never for a moment put on the manner of one who flirts with women, or is conscious that they are trying to flirt with him. His manner was just the same to men and women whom he liked. Evidently, Marion thought, he did not like Miss Rowan. He seldom spoke to her, although Marion noticed that he often fixed his eyes on her.

Another little trouble to sweet-tempered Captain Marion was the growing melancholy of his daughter Sydney. Young Fanshawe came very often, and was intensely devoted to Miss Rowan. He was very friendly with Sydney, as he was with Melissa, but he showed an undisguised devotion to Geraldine. She talked to him and went about with him as freely almost as if he had been her brother. It sometimes happened that poor Sydney was thrown a little into the shade—was left, as it were, in a corner by herself. Once or twice, when Clement Hope called after their walk to the Tower, she caught herself wishing that he would come very often, and thinking what a very handsome young man he was, and how like a picture, and how sweet and

tender his ways were, and how very delicious it would be if he were only to be a little friendly and companionlike with her, and talk with her in a recess of the room as somebody was always talking with Geraldine. But then, again would come the reflection into Sydney's mind that most assuredly if Clement came often he would devote himself either to Melissa or to Geraldine, and that she would be left out in the cold just the same as before. Captain Marion could not help seeing that Sydney was depressed and dull sometimes, and that something was wrong with her. He often thought he noticed, with peculiar pain, that there was a certain coldness in her manner towards himself, and that her affection was much less demonstrative than it had ever been, although at no time had she the demonstrative ways of Katherine.

This puzzled as well as pained him. None of the talk had reached his ears which had sometimes come to those of his daughter. He did not remember that he was still a clever, handsome, attractive man, little past the prime of life as yet, with plenty of money, and that in his house, apparently on the most familiar and affectionate terms with him, and more so with him than with any other of his family, was a young, bright, and handsome girl who was believed to be poor, and who had all the world before her to make a way of living for herself. It never occurred to Captain

Marion that a good many people were likely enough to assume, as Mrs. Aquitaine had long since assumed, that Sydney Marion would soon have a young stepmother.

CHAPTER XIV.

A CRISIS.

THE wrecks come to the shore. The shore is not expected to go out and meet the wrecks. Sometimes, badly off as the wrecks already are, it might be better for them if they did not come to the shore. The shore only batters them a little more than the sea had done. We do not know whether Montana could be fairly likened to a shore in the good sense or the bad, but certainly a good many wrecks came to him during his London visit. Wrecks of projects, wrecks of ideas, of hopes, of philanthropic schemes, of conspiracies—wrecks of men and of women constantly drifted to him. There was hardly a broken-down inventor, projector, or dreamer in London who did not seek him out and endeavour to get a new charter of hope from his helping hand. Men who believed in nothing sought him out in order that they might be confirmed in their unbelief. The visionaries who had plans for

bringing all the world to instant peace, the men who had discovered the means whereby war might be brought to an end through the virtue of some invention so destructive that whole armies and fleets disappeared at a touch, the men who had a scheme for the foundation of one universal religion and brotherhood of nations—all these came to him.

Montana employed several secretaries, and they were kept busy all day long in opening and answering his letters. He made it a point of principle or of honour to answer every letter if he could. Not a few of his correspondents were evidently writers whom the world called mad men or mad women, but still, when a letter was not anonymous, he endeavoured to give it some sort of reply. Happily for him, a considerable percentage of his writers were anonymous, and so much time at least was saved to him and to his staff. He continued to receive pretty regularly the effusions in the handwriting which had sent a cold shiver through the veins of Clement Hope. He hardly read them. He glanced at them just closely enough to see that they were of the same kind, breathing the same hysterical passion of girlish adoration and love. They had absolutely no effect upon Montana. The invitations to assist a new discoverer of perpetual motion had quite as much interest for him.

Not all those who sought Montana were

wrecks. Stately galleons floating safely to port, tall ammirals proud in their strength, gilded galleys with silken sails—these sought him out too. It became a matter of competition amongst the aristocratic to secure him for a dinner, and even to get his presence for a few minutes at an evening party was an object to be intrigued for long in advance. He only went amongst those who had shown some interest in his particular movement. No persuasion, no entreaty, could induce him to accept what may be called a general or miscellaneous invitation. He never consented to dine out or go out anywhere for the mere sake of meeting fashionable people and distinguished strangers.

Now, we have already mentioned the invitation pressed upon him by the Duke of Magdiel in the name of the Duchess, which Montana had coldly and almost contemptuously declined. The refusal naturally only made the Duchess still more eager to have him at her house, or even to meet him at some other house. It was impossible for her ever to unbend so far as to make the attempt again in her own name, even if there had been the least chance of success. She was therefore beginning quietly to give up the idea, and resigning herself to the conviction that after all these Americans have no manners. But her daughter, Lady Vanessa Barnes, was not to be so easily disconcerted. She had married a man whom her

mother did not like, and who was not of aristocratic rank, but who made up for his defects by having an immense amount of money, and by looking up to his young wife as the head of his house and the star of his existence.

Lady Vanessa Barnes held herself to be in a sort of rivalry to the Duchess as regarded social distinction, and had never forgiven her mother the coldness which the Duchess at one time showed to her future son-in-law. Lady Vanessa Barnes hardly ever made any movement in social life without having in the recesses of her mind some thought of the opportunity it gave her of showing how great a man her husband was, and how she could bring all the world to his feet as well as to her own. The moment she heard of the rebuff given to the Duchess by Montana, she determined that Montana must appear in her drawing-room, and be seen by the Duchess there. She was very clever, very beautiful, very ignorant, full of audacity and self-complacency, and with about as much reverence in her nature as a schoolboy has. She had heard a great deal about Montana, but to her he was for a long time only a funny sort of a man who had odd notions, and about whom people used to tire her with their ravings. But he became a very important personage indeed when there was a chance of bringing him to her drawing-room and showing him off in triumph to her mother the Duchess.

Lady Vanessa quickly went to work. She besought all her male friends who knew anything of Montana to try to get him to dine at her house, or even to come to one of her parties. All her plans proved failures. "I will have him, all the same," she said to herself; and the more the difficulties seemed to grow, the greater grew her determination to overcome them.

She had not many accomplishments, but she was a remarkably good amateur actress. She had so much courage that she could always make the fullest use of any gift she possessed, and she had the audacious purity of a savage girl. She once played the part of a saucy page at some private theatricals in her own house, and when the play was over she mingled with the company for the rest of the evening, making fearless and full display of her beautiful legs. Lady Vanessa went to hear Montana speak, and formed her opinion of him in a moment.

"The man has no more head than a pin," said the audacious lady. "I don't see anything in him. He is very handsome, but I don't care for beauty-men. I think I can manage *him*."

It was not difficult for any one interested in Montana's movements to find out where he passed his days and his evenings, with whom he had luncheon, and with whom he dined. He was dining one day with Captain Marion and his household, and the ladies had left the room and the

men were alone, when a servant brought a message that a person, who would give no name, wished particularly to speak a few words with Mr. Montana.

Montana never refused to obey a summons of this kind. It suited his purpose to show that he was ready to receive an appeal from any one, however unknown, and that he placed himself and his services at the disposal of all humanity. He did not ask who the person was, or even whether it was a man or a woman. He instantly rose, as a soldier rises at the word of command, and left the dining-room.

"Montana hardly ever gets a moment to himself," said Captain Marion, with a certain air of vexation, for one of his guests had just succeeded in drawing the leader and prophet into a conversation, animated on Montana's part to an unusual extent.

"Can't think how he manages to see so many people, and to do so much," one of the guests remarked. "Does he see every one that asks for him? They say he does."

"I really think he does," said Marion. "I never heard of his refusing to see anybody. If the crossing-sweeper from over the way wanted to have a discourse on the immortality of the soul with him, Montana would leave his dearest friend and go and talk with the new inquirer."

Meanwhile Montana was shown into the little

library, and there he found a tall young woman, veiled, according to the immemorial custom of mysterious heroines.

"You don't know me, Mr. Montana," the lady began, without giving him time for thought; "but I know you; every one knows you. I have come to-night to claim a service at your hands. I ask you to believe that it is one which will do you no discredit, and which, I think, you ought not to refuse. Will you trust yourself with me, and go to a place not ten minutes' drive from here?"

Montana was a little puzzled. He began to doubt whether he had not to do with some crazy religious enthusiast.

"I think," he said coldly, "I should like to know what sort of service I can render you, or what object I could serve."

"You have no right to ask any questions," was the quick answer. "I claim your service. I must have your presence and your assistance. More depends upon it than you can think of now."

"But am I the only one who could be of use?"

"You are the only one," she replied. "Do you think I would have sought you out in this audacious way if any but you could render the help which a human soul now demands?"

"Are you sincere?"

"Look in my face, and say if I appear like one who would waste your time to no purpose."

She threw up her veil, and showed Montana certainly a very handsome face, with bold dark eyes that looked into his own without a gleam of admiration or homage or coquetry, but only earnest resolve.

Montana became a little interested.

"It is not far, you say?"

"Ten minutes' drive," said she. "My carriage will take you there. I am a lady, although what I am doing now might not lead you to think so; and I know you don't care for ladies. You would grant my request much more readily, I dare say if I were a poor milliner's girl. No matter; I cannot help myself. I must be what I was born. And now let us waste no more time. Come with me."

Montana took his hat, and went with her. They got into a carriage, and drove in silence through some streets and squares. She never spoke a word, neither did he. It did not escape his observation, as she moved once or twice in the carriage, that under her veil and cloak she was in evening dress.

They came to a stately house. Montana got out and handed her from the carriage.

"Come with me," she said.

They passed up a flight of stairs, amongst many servants and some bustle. Montana was more and more puzzled. She drew him into a small side room, threw off her veil and cloak, and

showed her tall and very handsome figure in evening dress. Then, with a laugh, she said:

"Mr. Montana, you don't know me. I am Lady Vanessa Barnes, and my mother is the Duchess of Magdiel. I tried to get hold of you in a fair and open way. I sent you invitations again and again, and you would not come. So I determined to carry you off; and I have carried you off, and played this ridiculous game; and you will only look foolish if you don't fall into the thing now, and let people think you came here of your own free will. Otherwise it will be all over the town to-morrow that the great Mr. Montana was made the victim of a practical joke by Lady Vanessa Barnes. You can't help yourself; so come, forgive me, there's a dear man, and let us go into my drawing-room, and I'll present you to my mother."

Montana had at least one great quality of leadership. The more sudden a difficulty, the more quickly he saw how to deal with it. When driven into a dangerous corner, all his hesitancy and viewy vagueness left him, and he could survey the whole situation and make up his mind what to do in an instant. He saw at once that, trivial and ridiculous as his present embarrassment might appear, it was really serious for him. It would never do if it were to get known through London that the great mysterious leader of men had been made the victim of a saucy young woman's prac-

tical joke, and turned into the laughing stock of a fashionable drawing-room. Anything must be done to avoid that. He at once accepted Lady Vanessa's invitation, and took her apologies with a gracious gravity which almost impressed her. He met her guests, was the lion of the evening, was inexpressibly polite to the Duchess of Magdiel, condescending to the Duke. He managed somehow to give the Duke and Duchess, and many other people, to understand that he had come there solely to oblige Lady Vanessa. He spoke of Lady Vanessa with an almost paternal tenderness. Every one assumed that she was among his most devoted followers and closest friends.

Lady Vanessa herself was positively bewildered.

"Call me good at acting!" she said to herself. "I can't compare with him. I'm not in it at all. One would think the man had dandled me in his arms in my innocent infancy!"

She had gained her point, however, and felt grateful to him, and was determined never to let any one know what she had done. She began to feel interested in him, and to have a sort of admiration for him. His coolness, and what she would irreverently have called his "cheek," overpowered her.

Montana was determined, for his part, to exhibit Lady Vanessa everywhere in the character of his close friend and pupil. In no other way,

he thought, could he escape the risk of being one day or other made ridiculous by the true story getting out. He would exhibit her in the East End as well as in the West. The congregation of the Church of Free Souls must see the beautiful and high-born Lady Vanessa accompany him thither one Sunday. That would make all safe. Even if the story got about then, it would not be believed. Montana felt a good deal interested, too, in the sprightly audacity of the young woman. The very manner in which she had made light of him gave her a curious interest in his eyes. He was weary of the adoration and adulation of women. He positively admired this woman who had laughed at him, and was ready, if opportunity should arise, to laugh at him again. He had been drawn to Geraldine Rowan from the first by her evident dislike of him, and the resolute manner in which she repelled him. He was growing into a profound, and for him an almost impassioned, admiration of the girl who had thus treated him. He was beginning to believe that Geraldine was the indispensable companion of his life and sharer in his plans. He told himself that he was predestined to conquer her, to make her love him, to make her become his wife. He had set his heart upon this; and in what he set his heart upon Montana always saw the finger of Providence. It was not so much that he loved Geraldine, but

that he would not do without her; she must marry him.

In a very much modified and milder way he felt a desire now for the friendship of Lady Vanessa Barnes. The lady, for her part, liked his company well enough. It amused her to go about with him here and there; to drive him in her pony-carriage; to exhibit him in the Park; to parade him at Mr. Barnes's dinner-parties. He was still as much as ever the lion of the season, and it was something for her to be always able to command his presence. She had tried to penetrate into the story of his early life, and the one only return she had for her curiosity was an impression which somehow seemed to be conveyed to her that he was a man of high birth, who had deliberately made up his mind at an early age to sever himself from the society to which he naturally belonged. He did not say this to her, but she came to think it; perhaps had fancied it all for herself. Still, when she did jump to the conclusion, she let Montana know quickly enough that such was her conviction, and Montana did not contradict her or set her right. He only smiled a sweet vague smile, and said nothing. He was about this time beginning himself to think that there must be some truth in this theory of his lofty ancestry and stately youth.

It was easily arranged, then, that Lady Vanessa and her husband should go with Montana one

Sunday to the Church of Free Souls. On the day appointed for the expedition Montana was himself to deliver an exhortation to the Free Souls who lived on the smoke-wreaths of doctrine that went up from the altars of that temple. Montana came to the church with Lady Vanessa and her husband in their carriage; he handed Lady Vanessa out in the full sight of an awe-stricken crowd. Even the most uncompromising democratic spirits of the place were pleased to see their prophet in aristocratic company.

The Church of Free Souls was very crowded on this particular day. To get to see Montana, even for a moment, was the ambition of a great many. To be able to hear him speak was a thing to struggle and crush and wrangle for. To hear him speak from what in an ordinary temple would have been called a pulpit was to confer on oneself a sort of distinction for the remainder of the season. Then, the peculiarity of the place in which the discourse was to be held, and its odd out-of-the-way situation, lent a new and weird charm to the attraction of the day. Therefore the Church of Free Souls had had a specially strange and motley congregation. Carriages thronged the narrow ways that led to it. Unwonted silks and satins rustled through its dingy passages and up its decaying stairs. Huge servants in plush, with powdered heads, lounged about its rickety doors, and looked mildly contemptuous at the slums and

the people around. Artisans, with close-cut hair and keen dark eyes, hustled their way impatiently through this fashionable throng of fine ladies and finer footmen. Professional-looking young men, with rounded bulging foreheads and spectacles and long colourless hair, were pushing eagerly in. Young women in waterproofs, and with uncared-for locks and fringes, represented clearly the speculative part of the fair sex—the ladies who have “views” as to woman’s rights on this side of the grave, and are aggressively sceptical as to anybody’s rights, wrongs, or existence on the other.

Just as Montana was handing Lady Vanessa out of her carriage, another carriage brought up Captain Marion, Geraldine, Sydney Marion, and Melissa. Melissa grew red and her eyes shot angry fire as she saw the leader’s attention to the great lady of whose friendship for Montana she had already heard. For the first time in her life Melissa began to form political opinions, and they tended very decidedly in the direction of Radicalism. It flashed through her mind at that moment that the only thing which could make the world sufferable to rational and high-spirited persons would be the instant abolition of the order of aristocracy, and it is not certain that there was not at the same time in her breast a special yearning for very severe measures to be taken against the feminine members of that order.

Montana only saw Lady Vanessa as far as the

inner door of the temple. He then withdrew to enter the building by a side door, intending to remain in seclusion until the moment should arrive for him to come out upon the platform and begin his discourse. Montana made it a rule never to exhibit himself to a congregation of any kind before he had to speak, or after he had finished speaking. He kept out of sight, in mystic seclusion, until just the moment came for him to begin his address. Then he presented himself to his admirers, and the moment he had done speaking he bowed and withdrew. Even if he had to be one of many speakers at a public meeting, he always took care never to arrive at the place, or at least never to come on the platform, until it was his turn to go on. He had an impression that for an audience to have a man long under their eyes diminishes their interest in him. They grow familiar; they are critical; they begin, perhaps, to study minute points of appearance, of dress or deportment. The glory of a leader's presence might thus have its lustre worn away. Montana always took care that, as far as might be, his dress should be faultless. He wore it of the latest fashion of whatever civilised country he happened to be travelling in. To him there always seemed a dash of the vulgar about the ambition of some persons to look like foreigners, even like picturesque foreigners, in any country. Montana's principle was to dress up to the newest fashion of the people

surrounding him; and to let his personal appearance impress by its own merits, without aid from oddness or foreign ways.

The audience was settling down. An observer of any keenness could not have failed to notice its curious and motley composition. The mingling of rich and poor is of course a condition of all congregations; but congregations do not usually exhibit many different types of class-character, if such a word may be used, and of intellectual and moral individualism. Almost every man and woman here appeared to represent a separate mental order. So, at least, it seemed to Geraldine, as she looked round the nearest benches. Katherine sat by her, flushed and eager and nervous; Melissa pale, with downcast eyes, as if she hardly ventured too look up. Mr. Tresoce was supposed to be somewhere about the building, but he had got lost, and nobody took any trouble to find him. Clement Hope came in, and on his arm as he went up the hall leant his stately father. Many eyes turned towards the tall handsome young man, and the still taller old man with the fine head of grey hair and the broad shoulders, and the dignified half-soldierly bearing. He seemed to lean on Clement's more out of affection than because of any need of a staff or prop to sustain his steps. The congregation inclosed many remarkable faces and many remarkable pairs, but none, perhaps, more so than Mr. Varlowe and Clement.

There was a long service before the orator of the day appeared. The spiritual guide who usually conducted the ministrations of the church began by reading various portions from the theologies of all countries, the object of this exposition being to show that, whatever men might have said, or thought they said, or wanted to say, at all times and in all ages, on the question of the soul and the future life, they all believed exactly the same thing, and that the more strongly they contradicted their neighbours the more irresistibly did they prove that they and their neighbours were in complete accord. Confucius and Pascal, Mahomet and Cardinal Newman, Torquemada and the prophet Ali, George Fox and Dryden's Shaftesbury, were satisfactorily made out to have been in the most full and exquisite harmony in regard to their religious beliefs. The only objection, indeed, which the preacher seemed capable of suggesting with regard to the theological views of men in all ages and in all countries, was that a certain monotony pervaded them, and that it would have been rather better if they could now and then have managed to get up a slight difference of opinion, if only for the sake of adding interest to their speculations. The preacher then delivered a short discourse of his own, in which he explained that the great orator, teacher, soldier, and preacher from the New World, the man who himself proposed to found another and a newer

world, had consented to offer a few suggestions to that congregation to-day. He gave a brief outline of Montana's career, glowing into a kind of eloquence as he went on, and described Montana as one who had been warrior, explorer, pioneer, political leader, and spiritual guide, and who now, he said, had been able to lay the hand that had wielded the sabre and the pickaxe in the soft clasp of London fashion, and had bidden the West End to throb with a new and noble pulsation. He drew some such picture of Montana in the fashionable circles of London as Horace Walpole in two or three lines has done of Burke amongst the nobility and the wits of Paris, where the charm and earnestness of Burke for a while, we are told, made Christianity fashionable. He alluded also to Montana as a man who originally came from the Old World, and, he vaguely hinted, from some great old family. The impression left upon the minds of the congregation was that Montana's birth and parentage were of a lustre fully in keeping with that of his personal career. If he condescended to clasp hands with the working men as they were, it was not because he might not have lived, if he chose, all his life in the drawing-rooms of duchesses and the ante-rooms of palaces. The speaker so fully believed all he said, and was evidently so thoroughly impressed by Montana, that his discourse fell with strong effect on the expectant congregation. Those who

had seen Montana and those who had not seen him were alike eager for the moment when the hero of the hour should make his appearance.

At the right time, and from a side door to which people's eyes would not naturally have turned, Montana suddenly came out and stood in an instant full in face of the congregation, on the platform from which the former speaker had just been addressing them. A pale ray of sun found its way through the blurred panes of one window, and fell slanting on Montana's head and face. He looked handsome, impressive, and with his eyes looking directly at the congregation, and seeming to search into the thoughts of every man and woman who gazed at him.

There was a moment's pause, and then Montana had just begun with the words "My brothers and my sisters," when a cry from the midst of the hall turned every eye and every thought away from him. The cry came from the lips of the tall white-haired old man whom people had noticed not long before as he entered the church. Rising to his feet and clutching the rail of the seat before him, Mr. Varlowe fixed his gaze on Montana, and called aloud, "Oh, Absalon, my son! my son!"

CHAPTER XV.

“DOTH NOT A MEETING LIKE THIS MAKE
AMENDS?”

PERHAPS, if Montana had not had time to resist the first impulse of his mind, he might have given in to what certain writers call “the voice of nature.” Perhaps he might have welcomed with outward satisfaction at least his father’s recognition, and owned himself the long lost son. But unluckily for him, he had time to reflect. He could not stop in the middle of his discourse. He had to go on, and while going on he was well able to detach his thoughts from his subject and think over the course that was best for him to take. His eloquence did not cost him much trouble. The words came easily; the thoughts were vague or very slender. A thread of idea was able to water a whole field of phrase. He was free to let his eloquence stream away as it would while he tried to review his position and decide as to his course. He was not long undecided. Before he had got through half a dozen flowing sentences of monotonous eloquence and vague grandeur, he had made up his mind.

Perhaps even then, if Lady Vanessa Barnes had not been with him, if she had not been

brought into the place by him, if he had not exhibited her as a sort of stately captive in front of the whole congregation, he might have taken the part for a moment of a sincere and honest man, and gained by it in the end. But he could not resolve to step down from his pinnacle of greatness in her presence. Just now he had the superiority, but in a moment the tables would be turned. He dreaded her free and thoughtless laughter, her ridicule and her contempt. He knew what sort of story she would make for her friends of the ridiculous scene she had witnessed in the East End church when the great leader and prophet, whose descent was veiled in a mystery almost as sublime as that of one of the sons of the Greek gods, was claimed in the church by a retired livery-stable keeper, and had to confess himself the son of such a father. Rather than suffer that, Montana thought, he would do anything. He kept telling himself all the time that it was not for any idle pride of his own, but for the sake of the cause. What would become of the cause he was to lead, the people whose chief and prophet he was to be, if he were thus made a theme for aristocratic ridicule and popular laughter? Then, after all, perhaps the old man was mistaken. There was still hope. It might turn out that the man was not Mr. Varlowe and his father, but somebody else; and in any case, is everything true that one fancies has happened in his child-

hood and his youth? Perhaps it was all but a dream, the memory of that old narrow vulgar time in the coarse Northern town, when the youth of genius was still only dreaming of a career; that time when even love itself seemed a burden to an ambitious young man determined to dazzle the world, and still kept back by the clinging arms of his tender wife. All that ought to be a dream—ought to be only as smoke and cloud in the career of a great man, to be puffed away from the memory and regarded as nothing. Montana made up his mind. He put it to himself in one moment and in one phrase. The phrase suddenly rose up in his mind, and it nearly came to his tongue. It satisfied him; it suited him as well as a code of morality. The phrase was this: "The man who would do great things belongs to the future, not to the past."

Montana stood erect upon his platform, determined to belong to the future and not to the past. He saw his father's eyes fixed on him with intense and wistful eagerness. He could see that Clement Hope was striving to keep the old man quiet, probably until some seemly moment should come for a meeting between him and his supposed son. He could see astonishment in the eyes of many people. He could see Lady Vanessa Barnes look up to him with amused curiosity in her looks. He turned his eyes composedly away and began his discourse.

The discourse was surely very eloquent. It must have been. It told of "the continuity of the human race." It established the principle that men in this world, and in whatever world, are capable of working in constant unbroken co-operation; that the workers in other spheres are influencing us by their help and sympathy and their encouragement if we be only worthy to receive it; and that we in our turn can spread the widening circle of our influence to realms of whose composition and population we have no conception now. To some of his listeners it seemed an almost angelic eloquence. Montana's voice was so sweet, sonorous, and musical; his action was so graceful, his look was so intense, that some who gazed on him and listened to him seemed to be lifted into a higher and a purer atmosphere than that of the common day. Some there were, probably, even in that hall, who found a certain difficulty in understanding what Montana was talking about, who did not quite see that he had clearly made out an immediate connection between themselves and everybody else in all creation, and who even had a sort of doubt as to whether Montana really knew much more about all the other worlds he was describing than they did themselves.

Perhaps, if Clement Hope had had a mind free to pay any attention to the subject, he might have become a little sceptical too; but happily

for his continued faith in his leader, his whole soul was absorbed in the effort to keep Mr. Varlowe in decorous restraint. He was so agitated and perturbed by what had happened, and what he feared might again happen, that he had no thought for the words of the orator. The sweet full voice sounded in his ears, but brought with it no meaning to his senses.

As for Sydney Marion, she tried to catch a gleam of distinct meaning now and then, honestly tried, and honestly reasoned with herself as to whether it was not her stupidity, and whether, after all, the people around were not right, and the discourse was not eloquent, entrancing, exalting. But it came to an end without having convinced her that she was wrong.

Lady Vanessa listened with good-humoured indifference—that is to say, she listened to a passage now and then, and, as she did not care much about the continuity of the race, she allowed her thoughts to wander away to anything else. The incident which preluded the discourse astonished her for a while, but she assumed that it was really only the case of some crazy old man whose admiration for the great Montana had led him into some ridiculous demonstration. That sort of thing, for aught she knew, might be one of the ordinary ceremonies of the Church of Free Souls. She remembered having been taken when she was a child to some sort of church or meeting-house, or

religious assemblage of some kind, where an old woman got up and sang a queer crooning chant in the middle of the ceremonies, and nobody seemed shocked or even astonished; therefore, for all she knew, grey-haired men might be crying out symbolical recognition of imaginary sons at every meeting in the Church of Free Souls. Such might, in fact, be only the accepted way among that congregation of expressing admiration for the preacher; something in a manner equivalent to the "hear, hear" of the House of Commons.

As for Geraldine, she, like Clement Hope, was wholly absorbed by the strange incident, by the cry of the old man, his wild recognition of a supposed son. Her eyes were fixed all the time on him and on Clement. She watched with the deepest sympathy and interest the young man's eager efforts to keep the old man from again disturbing the quiet of the audience. She admired Mr. Varlowe's face and figure. He seemed the artist's very ideal of a noble and a loving father claiming a long-lost son, if one were seeking such subject for a picture. She felt deeply for Clement. She assumed that some pathetic memory must have proved too much for Mr. Varlowe, and made him for the moment like one distraught, and she was grieved to think of the pain that would have to be borne by poor Clement if the mood of distraction should last. She felt a strange longing, which it would have needed some courage to gratify,

even in that odd place—a longing to go over and take a seat at Mr. Varlowe's other side, and help Clement in trying to quiet him, and comfort him, and reason him out of his delusion. Indeed, she was so impulsive a girl that, if Sydney Marion had not been with her, it is quite possible that she might have made an attempt to carry this longing into action. But under Sydney Marion's quiet eyes she felt morally coerced into remaining quiet, and so she sat and endured Montana's discourse, and did not even try to catch the meaning of one word of it.

The discourse came to an end at last. Montana descended the steps of his platform slowly, and with his accustomed air of unruffled composure. He looked earnestly to where Mr. Varlowe and Clement were sitting, and his look was full of sympathy and commiseration. Some kindly wonder and curiosity were expressed in it as well. He almost stopped for a moment as he was about to leave the room, in order to turn one other glance upon the old man who had so strangely interrupted his discourse. Every one saw Montana thus employ his sympathetic eyes; and many thought it but another evidence, if such were needed, of Montana's tenderness for all men. There were persons who might have been so vexed, even preachers and professed ministers of religion, by any interruption of the kind as to lose patience and pity for the author of the disturbance. But Montana had

only sympathy and kindly feeling for this foolish old man, who had so nearly turned the whole proceedings of the day into ridicule.

Why did a sudden ray of strange conviction pierce into the perplexity of Geraldine's mind just at that moment? She never could tell; but the expression on Montana's face, which deceived so many others, carried instant enlightenment to her. She felt sure that old man was Montana's father, and that Montana knew it. This had not occurred to her at first. She thought, like everybody else, that the poor old man was simply the victim of an hallucination born of his love and his hope. But Montana's expression as he looked across at Mr. Varlowe seemed to strike home to her very heart with the conviction that he was acting a part. The expression was so carefully, so artificially adjusted for the occasion, as it seemed to her, that it could only be put on for the purpose of playing out a part. It may be that she was helped to this belief by the striking likeness which she suddenly saw in Montana's face and figure to the face and figure of the old man who claimed him as a son. Mr. Varlowe was but Montana whitened with the hoar-frost of time. Montana was a but a dark-haired and cold-hearted Mr. Varlowe. Geraldine felt terribly satisfied of the truth of her conviction; terribly, because there was something appalling in the belief that such a man was an utter impostor, and that nobody would believe

it but herself, and that she would have to be that very day, almost every day, in his company.

As Montana passed out of the room, he fixed on Clement a special look of affectionate interest and sympathy. Mr. Varlowe gazed wistfully after him, and made a movement as if he would leave his seat. Clement quietly kept him in his place. Geraldine could see that to Mr. Varlowe's start and gaze of imploring affection Montana only responded by the same look of interested kindness and commiseration, the look of one who feels for some apparent delusion or sorrow on the part of a perfect stranger. Geraldine felt as if the blood in her veins were turning chill.

Montana remained in the room alone until the short service was over. He was waiting with quiet composure, although with a mind far from quiet, for the inevitable moment, not many moments off, when he must be confronted with his father. The time came. A knock was heard at the door. Montana opened it, and his father and Clement Hope came in. Mr. Varlowe began in his rough Northern way:—

"You don't mean to say you don't know me, Edmund, my boy? You don't mean to say you don't recognise your father? You are Edmund Varlowe. Good God! of course you are. I'd know you among ten thousand."

Montana turned to Clement and looked into his eyes. Clement's own gaze had wonder and

bewilderment in it. Montana looked him full in the face, and shook his head with a kindly commiserating expression. "This is Mr. Varlowe, your father?" he asked of the young man.

"Yes," said Clement; "he thinks you are his son."

"Thinks he is my son!" Mr. Varlowe exclaimed; "God! I know he is my son. Do you think I could ever be mistaken? I have waited, and watched, and prayed for him to come back these years, and I knew he would come back. I knew he would come all the time, and I knew him the moment I saw him come into that pulpit to preach. Why won't you speak? Why won't you say you know me?"

"My dear old friend," said Montana sweetly, "I am sorry, so sorry, to have to disappoint your very very natural hopes, to see your son. Assuredly you will see him one day yet—pray Heaven you may. But you are mistaken about me. I am not your son. I could wish I were, to be the son of so fond a father, and to be able to give him back the hope of his life; but you will trust to a better and a higher hope than I can give you. I am not your son."

Mr. Varlowe threw his arms wildly out, as if he would call all the world and all nature to bear witness for him in his extraordinary bewilderment.

"Well," he said, "this beats all! This is what

I have been waiting for and praying for these years. This is what I have longed for; and now it all comes to this! My son comes back, and he don't know me, and he won't know me! What are you ashamed of, Edmund? Do you think I am poor? I am not poor. I have plenty of money. Do you think I will trouble you or interfere with you? I will not. You may have any career you like now. I will help you to it. You shall have all my money. You shall have anything. Don't say you are not my boy. Don't, don't say it!"

Montana shook his head sadly and sweetly. He felt no mental or moral difficulty, now that the step was taken. He had decided that he was not the son of the old livery-stable keeper, and, in his present condition, that decision had settled everything. He felt no trouble of conscience, but was serenely satisfied with himself. He was sorry for the old man, but it was only as one is sorry for somebody in a play, or at most is sorry for some stranger whose grief one sees and pities, but cannot share.

Clement tried to draw Mr. Varlowe away.

"You had better come, father; and don't you think you ought to say something to Mr. Montana to explain your mistake? You see it is a mistake now, don't you?"

"It is not a mistake," Mr. Varlowe exclaimed in a thundering voice, smiting the floor with his

stick. "I never was mistaken: I could not be mistaken in my boy. That is my Edmund, though he casts me off; and he is my Edmund still, though I cast him off now. Come away, Clem, my lad. You are my son now, and you alone; but as sure as God's in heaven, that man there is Edmund Varlowe, who was the son of my wife, Catherine Varlowe, and of myself; and all the world will know it one day just as well as he knows it now. Come away, lad."

CHAPTER XVI.

"ALL FANCY-SICK SHE IS."

MONTANA got into Lady Vanessa's carriage. He was to have luncheon with her and her husband that day. Lady Vanessa chaffed him saucily and even rudely about the old man who had claimed him as a son. She had little idea of the mischief she was doing. Any chance that there might have been of Montana's returning to a sense of honour and duty was lost on that drive to Lady Vanessa's house. Montana began to hate her with a strange blending of admiration, and and even with a throb of passion that was not hate. There was something so new to him in the sensation of being thus chaffed and laughed at by

a handsome woman, that it gave a strange turn to his thoughts, and opened a new spring of excitement and inner emotion, lonely amongst incessant crowds. He felt curious longings to be revenged on the sprightly lady, and knew for the first time the bitter-sweet sensation that comes to a man when he is angry with a woman and yet is forced to admire her.

He went home that night in doubting mood, unusual to him. He began to feel that his way was slipping from beneath him, or at least that he himself was slipping away from the path he had marked out. He found that there were emotions which could disturb him still, and which had nothing to do with his own career and public work. He had believed himself absolutely unimpassioned, master of all his emotions, capable of controlling not only every look, but every thought, and already he found himself distracted from the straight path by the strange and, as it seemed, almost fatal admiration he felt for Geraldine Rowan. And now for his further confusion came the cross-light of a new sensation far inferior in intensity and very different in colour, but strong enough to perplex and dazzle for the moment—a flame of petulant emotion towards a pretty, saucy, young, aristocratic woman; a fear of her, and a longing to obtain some sort of mastery over her.

Montana began to think it would be well

for him to set about his great scheme, to put it in motion, and make a grand triumphal departure from London with the close of the season, carrying Geraldine Rowan with him as his wife and as the companion of his expedition, his associate in the foundation of the sublime colony beyond the seas, out of which a new world and a new life for the old world were gradually to arise.

Did Montana really believe in this scheme? That, we suppose, no one can ever know. It is not likely—at least, from what was afterwards discovered, it does not seem likely—that he had ever thought the matter deliberately over, or had done more than allow the idea to grow upon him from day to day. He believed very thoroughly in himself, and believed that anything he started must come to a success. He had worked himself into a Napoleonic faith in his star, and in heaven's special protection of him. This faith may have been born of sheer vanity, or of prolonged mental strain almost approaching to a condition of intellectual derangement, but at all events it supplied him with any quality of earnestness which he could be said to have possessed. Whatever the strength of his faith, either in his project or himself, it does not appear that at this time he was making any preparation to carry his great scheme into effect. He listened to people's suggestions concerning it, and answered all manner of inquiries and letters. He gave everyone to

understand that the scheme was growing into active movement day by day, and that he had all its details under his own eyes and in his own hands; but nobody was ever admitted to genuine confidence with him, nor did he tell anybody what his preparations were. He was merely at present enjoying his success in his own fashion. He had found a career, and this was its zenith and its consummation. His strongest ambition all his life through had been to play to one great audience, that of London; to fashionable, aristocratic, wealthy London in the stalls and boxes, and artisan, hard-handed, poor-living London in the galleries. Now he had reached the height of his hopes. With one hand he grasped the west end and with the other the east. His vanity ought to have been almost satisfied. If he was capable of deliberately thinking over a difficulty or a crisis of any kind, we might assume that he went calmly and fully into counsel with himself, reviewed his position, and set his plans out before him to look at them. We might assume that, having done this, he had come to the conclusion that the zenith of his London career had in any case been reached; that even if nothing out of the common had arisen, his object now must be to avoid the risk of a descent or an anti-climax; and that the incident in the church had hastened the necessity for bringing the London episode to a conclusion. On the other hand, anything like a

hasty departure from London would only give the appearance of probability to the most improbable story—Montana had now really worked himself into a mood to regard Mr. Varlowe's story as monstrously improbable—and make people lose faith in him. The conclusion to which Montana came was that he must stay in London to the close of the season and then depart. But it is not likely that this conclusion came by virtue of any slow and careful process of thought. It came to Montana by instinct, as most of his conclusions did. That was his way. He had no thought of a resolution one moment, and it was a fixed resolve the next. It pleased and comforted him to think that these instinctive and somewhat feminine conclusions were special revelations—voices of oracles speaking within his breast and guiding him aright.

The little incident in the Church of Free Souls did seem likely to have a certain influence over public opinion. It got about in all manner of more or less distorted versions. In no case did it amount to anything much more than the fact that there had been a scene in the church when Montana spoke there, and that some old man, whom nobody knew, had professed to recognise Montana as his son, and that Montana had disclaimed him. There was not much in that, perhaps, and very few people went into the question seriously enough to ask themselves

whether the old man was sane or insane, or whether there was the slightest foundation for the idea he had taken up. Still, the incident was of a certain importance. It called sharp attention to the fact that there was some mystery about Montana's career which might not be a great and superb thing after all. The stream might, if traced back to its source, be found to arise in a commonplace little well in a stable-yard, instead of a dark and sacred spring among the solemn trees of some historic and haunted grove. The story set curiosity and inquiry going in that direction, and that in itself was not ominous of good for Montana. It indicated a new turn in public opinion. Up to that time, people who disputed about him had only disputed as to the man himself, his earnestness, his sincerity, his eloquence. Now they began to ask, "What is he, after all? Where does he come from? Is his own account of himself the true one?"

Lady Vanessa told the story wherever she went, embellishing it with heedless humour here and there. From her lips it became a story of grotesque and Hudibrastic drollery. It told of a whole service suddenly disturbed, an entire congregation startled, first stricken with amazement, and then convulsed with laughter; of an orator and a prophet interrupted in the full flood of his discourse by a maniac, who insisted on rushing into the pulpit with him, clinging round his neck, sobbing on his bosom, and claiming him as his

long-lost son. Lady Vanessa admired Montana in her own peculiar way, which had nothing whatever of coquetry about it; but she delighted in making fun of him and trying to make him look ridiculous. It was a real pleasure to her, the sense of power which she felt when she could succeed in making so conspicuous a man—such an idol of society and of the people—seem an object of laughter. It gave her the same sort of delight that some people get from annoying a favourite dog, or from putting ridiculous ornaments on a pet cat.

If things went on like this, people would soon begin to insist on questioning themselves and their friends as to the exact meaning of some of Montana's sayings, and the precise practical nature of that scheme for a new world which he was understood to have in hand. Vaguely, strangely, a sense of the growing danger appeared to creep in upon Montana's mind. He began to feel it as one even in a well warmed and curtained room grows to be conscious of the presence of the east wind. He became impressed with the necessity for doing something—what, he did not yet exactly know. Montana was a man who, when brought face to face with a difficulty and compelled to act, would always act with wonderful quickness, energy, and courage. As indolent men of a certain class are surprisingly energetic when they have to shake off their indolence and do something, so Montana, a born dreamer of the unimaginative order—a

man who could dream about himself for hours and days, and contemplate himself, his career, and his soul, as an Indian fakir contemplates his body—had, when brought face to face with the necessity for action, the instinct of a commander and the eye of a pilot. He was conscious of this himself, and therefore never troubled himself about decisions and plans till necessity brought the moment of making the decision and announcing the plan.

The incident in the Church of Free Souls had much disturbed some of the inmates of Captain Marion's household. Geraldine kept silent about it. She would not give any opinion. Melissa raged and blazed against the silly old man who had presumed to interfere with Mr. Montana, and she somehow seemed to take Clement Hope into her wrath, and to regard the whole thing as a device in which that luckless young man had been directly and malignantly engaged. Katherine was on the same side, but she was more timid about expressing her opinions. She seemed scared—an unusual thing for her—and cast furtive, almost fearful, glances every now and then at her husband, as if she were actually beginning to be afraid of him. Mr. Trescoe, indeed, came out also in a new light. He spoke with an energy that no one ever before had supposed him to have. He boldly and bluntly denounced Montana as a "genuine humbug," declared that he had not the

slightest doubt the old fellow was his father, and a deuced deal too good a father for such a charlatan, and prophesied that before three months were over Montana would be known to everybody as a quack and a sham. These fearful opinions were combated with such anger and contempt by Melissa that Captain Marion had to beg of Trescoe to discontinue his attacks in order to save Melissa's temper, and spare the nerves of the company. Captain Marion himself was clear and satisfied in his mind. Montana said the old man was not his father, and there was an end of the matter. The old man had been such a long time hoping and praying for his son's return, that he was ready to accept any good-looking stranger as the long-lost heir. The wonder was, Captain Marion said that he had not found somebody to take the place of his vanished son long ago. Whatever Montana said must be true. Captain Marion was not even annoyed or offended by those who did not agree with him on this point. It was settled and certain.

Mr. Aquitaine came suddenly up from the north, and heard the description of the whole incident. The description, it must be owned, was given with very different colouring, and even very different array of facts, by the various people round Captain Marion's table. Aquitaine looked grave. He did not put away the whole affair as a trivial and unmeaning incident. In the north he

had been making special inquiries about the young man who had once been employed in his house, and who was undoubtedly Mr. Varlowe's son. There were some clerks in the offices who still remembered young Varlowe clearly enough. They all bore testimony to one set of facts: that he was very tall, dark, singularly handsome, with strange abstracted manners, and apparently an inordinate self-conceit and belief in himself. These statements set Aquitaine thinking. Now, when he heard that Mr. Varlowe had actually claimed Montana for his son, it did not impress his mind as absolutely certain that the old livery-stable keeper was labouring under an hallucination. This seemed to him to suggest some terrible momentous possibilities. If Montana was a deceiver in this, in what else might he not be a deceiver? It was now certain that, besides the hundreds and thousands in all classes who had faith in him, and would trust anything to him, some of Aquitaine's own nearest and dearest personal friends were ready to put their property, their lives, their happiness, almost their very souls, at his disposal. Up to this time, Aquitaine had not the faintest notion how things were going with his own hapless little daughter. It was only when they discussed the question in Captain Marion's house at luncheon, and when he saw the girl's flashing eyes and quivering lips as she maintained Montana's perfect nobleness and integrity, it was only then that a

suspicion shot into his mind, and made him ask himself bitterly why he had felt so much surprised that Marion took so little heed of his daughter Katherine and her too open devotion to Montana.

Aquitaine was prompt in action. He went at once to Melissa. He found the girl in her room, and opened his subject with a certain sternness very unusual for him in his dealings with her.

"Look here, Melissa," he said. "I want you to be more careful than you are in the way you talk about Mr. Montana."

Melissa started, and turned her eyes upon the carpet. Her lips trembled.

"I don't like to hear any girl," he said, "talking with such open admiration and rapture about a man, and making herself his champion and his devotee. Besides there is something I have heard about Montana—well, no, I won't say that; not that I have heard anything against him, but something has come to my mind that makes a sort of doubt—and it may be right, or it may be wrong—but anyhow it is not well, in the mean time, that you should get your name mixed up with his."

"Oh, papa," said Melissa, "what are you saying?"

"Well, my dear, I am saying exactly what I think. Anybody who heard you raving about him to-day, before all those people, would think you were some silly girl who had fallen in love with the man, and had not the sense to conceal it."

Melissa looked up at first, red and angry, and Aquitaine expected one of her familiar outbursts of temper. But to his surprise her pretty little face became contorted, and she burst into tears.

"Why, what is the matter with the child?" her father said. "I have not been saying anything very dreadful, Melissa. I am only giving you advice."

She covered her eyes with her handkerchief, and only sobbed out:

"I never saw you angry like that with me before. I'm not used to it."

"Well, well, my dear, I don't mean to be angry with you, but I want to impress you with some sense of the necessity of being a little careful. I quite understand a girl's admiring a man like Montana, and of course he is twenty years at least older than you are, and I dare say you don't think any harm about going into any raptures about a man of that age. But don't do it, my dear; be a little cautious. I can't tell you exactly what I am thinking of, and there is not very much to tell; but I am not quite certain about Montana, and I have given Marion a caution, though it won't do him any good, and his daughter Katherine makes exhibitions of herself almost as bad as"—he was going to say "your own," but he stopped out of tenderness for poor Melissa's feelings. He was a resolute man, however, when

he clearly saw his way to anything, and he now saw his way very clearly to the necessity for checking Melissa's public displays of her admiration for Montana.

"Fact is, Mel," he said, "if you don't be a little more careful, I should think the best thing would be for you to come back with me to the north as soon as possible."

She started at the words. Aquitaine saw with pain that the suggestion was a terror to her. She did not want to go home. It had come to that. Well, he must make allowances. London in the season is London in the season, to be sure, and girls will like parties and balls, and the opera, and visits, and all the rest of it as long as grass grows and water runs, and the best of parents must be content to put up with the knowledge that his daughter can get on very well without him, and be very happy away from home, when her home is not in London. So he only winced, and pulled himself together, and was good-humoured as before.

"If you like to stay till the end of the season, Mel," he said, "you shall do so, my dear, but only on this condition, remember. Just bear my warning in mind. Don't make a display of your admiration for our friend. It is a very natural admiration, I am sure, and in one way I am glad to find that you can admire anybody so much as that; and I did not think it, somehow, once;

and I ought to be glad of it, and I am glad of it in a way; only, don't show it, my dear, don't show it so much."

CHAPTER XVII.

GERALDINE'S EXPEDITION.

NOW, there was nothing in all this conversation, one would think, that ought to have brought positive terror to the girl's breast. Nobody could know better than Melissa how little likely Mr. Aquitaine was to treat her with harshness; and, after all, even the most maidenly and modest of girls need not feel utterly humbled because her father has given her a caution not to talk too rapturously of a distinguished public man. One can easily imagine a very well regulated and orderly little girl losing herself in wild avowals of admiration for Mr. Gladstone, or Mr. Browning, or Dean Stanley, or Sir Frederick Leighton, and being bidden by her father to rave an octave or so lower in general company, and not feeling utterly crushed by the rebuke. But the moment Mr. Aquitaine had gone, Melissa threw herself down on the floor all of a heap, and bemoaned herself there for a while, cowering like one in physical terror. Then taken with a sudden thought she jumped up, shook out her betossed skirts,

dashed her hair into something like order, ran to Geraldine Rowan's room, and knocked at the door.

"Let me in! Quick! quick! Let me in!"

Geraldine opened the door, and let the alarmed girl in.

"Oh, Geraldine!" she exclaimed; "I have done a dreadful thing. You must help me; you must do something—I don't know what; but you must get me out of this scrape. I am in such a fix! Oh, why did I ever do it!"

"What have you done, dear?" Geraldine asked, really alarmed at the girl's manner.

"Such a dreadful thing! Oh! how can I tell you? But I had better tell you than anybody else. You must get me out of it. You must get me out of it. You must! you must!"

"But what have you done, my child?"

"I have written to Mr. Montana. I have written a mad love-letter; I have put my name to it; and I have told him I'll go anywhere over the world with him, if he'll let me; follow him as a page, if he likes—I think people did such things in books, didn't they?—or I'll—I'll—I'll marry him if he likes—if he will have me!"

"You have not written this dreadful stuff to Mr. Montana?"

"Oh, haven't I though! Yes, but I have; and I have signed it with my name. Oh! I've been and done it this time, Geraldine; and won't there

be a row in the building when my father comes to know!"

"What on earth possessed you to do such a piece of madness? Why did not Mr. Aquitaine take you home long ago, or stay here to look after you? Why did not you tell me what you were going to do?"

"Well, it's partly your fault," said Melissa, flashing up; "and so you are bound to get me out of this fix."

"Partly my fault?"

"Yes, I say it is your fault; and it's *all* your fault. You are to blame for the whole of it. Why did you go on so—condemning Mr. Montana and running him down? You might have known it would have set me off wild in the other direction."

"But I did not condemn him," said Geraldine; "I did not run him down."

"You sat and listened, and looked on approvingly, while Mr. Trescoe—that fool, that dull, silly, weak creature!—yes, you listened while he ran Mr. Montana down; and you agreed with him, and you agreed with his doubts, and you agreed with everything that was said against him; and what was I to do? Of course I wasn't going to stand that. I resolved to show him that I, at least, did not doubt him and there—that's why I did it; and you are to blame, and you must get me out of it now."

"What can we do?" Geraldine said, almost in despair.

"I don't know," said Melissa, sitting down now rather composedly, and nursing one knee between her two little hands; "but you have got me into it, Geraldine, and you must get me out of it, and that's all about it."

Geraldine thought the matter out as well as she could, her face puckered up with anxiety, and resting her chin upon her hand. A general on the eve of a difficult campaign, or a judge perplexed by some most exasperating point of law, could hardly have had a brain more perturbed by the difficulties and responsibilities of the hour. "When did you write this letter?" she said at last.

"Oh, I don't know; about an hour ago, or it may be an hour and half, perhaps, or two hours; before luncheon—before papa came and talked to me. He has been talking to me. Did I, or didn't I, tell you? Yes, he has been advising me and talking to me; and I know, if he found out this, things would be bad. It must have been an hour and a half ago, I think."

"How did you get it sent to the post?"

"Well, I had it in my pocket when Sydney and I walked out to-day, and I just stayed a moment behind her at the corner of the street, and dropped it into the letter-box there."

"Good gracious!" said Geraldine; "what deceits and dodges one gets into!"

"Never mind what one gets into," said Melissa; "get me out of this now; that is more to the point."

A wave of inspiration tossed up a purpose in Geraldine's mind.

"He may not have got it yet," she said. "We'll get it back from him, Melissa. I will go myself and get it back."

"Oh, will you?" said Melissa, her eyes brightening up with hope and wonder. "Will you have courage? Will you do it? Have you the nerve? I know you American girls will do anything; but can you do this?"

"I have nerve enough when I want to help a friend out of trouble," said Geraldine; "and I am not an American girl, Melissa, but I have learnt in America not to be ashamed or afraid of doing anything that is right. Girls in America are brave and free, and they are only taught to be afraid or ashamed of doing what is wrong."

Then she stopped and began to feel rather ashamed of preaching at the poor little offender before her, but Melissa had hurt her by speaking of American girls as if they were girls who would do anything without regard for the proprieties. "Yes, I will go," Geraldine said again; "we may be beforehand with the postman. Mr. Montana may not have got it."

"If I could get it back again," Melissa murmured piteously—"if I could only be certain that

he had not read it, I am sure, Geraldine, I'd never do such a thing again; at least, I think I wouldn't; oh, indeed, I do; I think I would not do it again."

"I am sure you would not do it again," said Geraldine. "I would not do what I am going to do for you if I thought there was the least chance of your attempting such a thing any more."

"Well, don't preach, there's a good girl," said Melissa; "I never could stand being preached at."

Even in all her gratitude to Geraldine she could not subdue her mutinous inclination, and would not be preached at.

"I am afraid preaching does not do you good," Geraldine said softly; "perhaps you are not much worse than many of your neighbours in that way. Anyhow, Melissa, I will go to Mr. Montana. I will not trust to sending anybody. Nobody must know about this but you and I and he, and if I can, he shan't know your name."

Yes, Geraldine thought to herself, I will go. What does it matter? It is not anything wrong. What if people do think I am American in my ways, and that I venture to do things that English girls would not do? I don't care. This is not venturing very far, after all, to pull a friend out of a trouble; and if anyone finds out that I have done so, and is angry with me, or thinks badly of me, well—I can bear it—I'd do more than that to help poor Melissa.

One hour and a half in the day Montana kept

for himself and his few especial friends. That was the time from half-past five to seven. The general public were shut out at that time, and Montana was shut in. Those who were able to see him then were the favoured intimates to whom he had given the *consigne*, and who would come and talk to him in a friendly way about anything or nothing and smoke a cigar with him. It was a great privilege to be amongst those who were admitted to Montana's hour of privacy. Montana took care to give admittance in such a manner as to make it evident that he was not distributing his favours only amongst the powerful and the great. Some of his poorest and humblest followers had the pass-word. Women as well as men were privileged. It was not long before Lady Vanessa established for herself and her husband the right of entry, and she sometimes came even without her husband, and talked with Montana and whoever happened to be there, and occasionally smoked a cigarette in her affable and familiar way. Young men who could get admittance at this special hour were proud of it, and talked of it a good deal amongst their friends.

Now, as chance would have it, this was the very time of the day when Geraldine had to make her visit to Montana. She thought she could get to his place easily, speak to him, and get back again before it was time to dress for dinner. There was not a moment to be lost. She hurried down-

stairs, and went her way with heart high beating, it must be owned, but very resolute and quiet, determined to put the thing through, and not to let poor Melissa get into trouble because of any fearfulness or hesitation on her part.

Montana had just entered his little reception-room to wait for any of his friends who might come, when he was told that a lady wanted to see him. He replied that he was engaged, and at that hour could see no one. The servant came back with a still more pressing request from the lady to spare her a few moments.

Montana asked, would the lady favour him with her name?

Reply: "No, the lady would rather not, but she could say that he knew her very well."

Montana looked at his watch, and saw that it yet wanted a minute or two of half-past five. Perhaps nobody would come very punctually. He might get rid of this unusual visitor in good time. "Let the lady be shown up." To his surprise, when she came into the room, he saw that it was Geraldine Rowan. But if he felt surprise, as he certainly did, he took care not to show it. He advanced to Miss Rowan with so easy and friendly a manner that she might have thought he was expecting her, and a looker-on might have supposed that her visit to him was the most ordinary and natural thing in the world.

Geraldine felt greatly reassured by this, and there was something so gracious and kindly in his smile that she began to understand dimly what was the meaning of the sort of fascination he seemed to exercise over so many men and women. They shook hands; Montana placed a chair for her, and said he was glad to see her, in a tone admirably suited to encourage confidential communication, although neither in tone nor in look did he show the slightest appearance of one who expects a confidence, or who regards the whole meeting as other than a common-place friendly visit.

"Mr. Montana," she said—and then she stopped for want of breath, and for a moment it seemed as if she really could get no words to go on with. Then she braced herself, and tried to find deliberate utterance. "Mr. Montana," she went on, "you will think it strange that I have come in this way to see you, and I think it strange myself."

Montana only said, "I am not likely to think anything strange that Miss Rowan does; and besides, strange things are often the right things, and I am sure whatever you do is done with a right purpose."

"Thank you," she said, and she really felt grateful to him for the manner in which he had relieved her of some of her embarrassment. "I shan't keep you long."

"That," said Montana, "is an ungracious beginning."

"I shan't keep you long," she repeated. "I have come to ask you a favour, Mr. Montana. Perhaps it is an act of justice. It ought to be. But I don't know, and I am quite willing to put it as a favour."

"I only hope it is something very hard to do, so that I may do it, and show that I am not unworthy of being asked."

"It is not hard to do. It ought not to be hard to any man, and I should think it ought to be least of all hard to you. I put it as a favour. I don't come to you willingly, Mr. Montana; I don't admire you, and you know it. I don't believe in you, whatever other people may do."

"You will believe in me one day," said Montana composedly, "and you will help me, and join with me. That is as certain as the rising of the sun to-morrow."

She looked at him with something like contempt. "I don't believe in you now, at all events," she said, "and I am more than ever convinced that I am right by things that have lately happened. I don't believe you are what you say you are; at least, I believe you are what you say you are not."

Geraldine looked straight into his eyes to see if any sign of embarrassment or surprise might be found there as she spoke these audacious words. But the eyes returned her look with that calm, grave, sweet expression which was always in them. „If Montana is an impostor," she thought "he is

well made up for his part." The truth was, that Montana had prepared himself again and again for every possible utterance of this kind from every conceivable person, and was as little likely to be put out now as a trained actor on the stage is put out by the speech of the theatric opponent which gives him his cue.

"Tell me," he said gently, "what is the favour you want of me? if it is in my power, you shall have it all the same, whether you believe in me or not. How you act towards me could not be any guide for my acting towards you. The less you think well of me, the greater is my anxiety to show that I don't deserve to be thought badly of."

"Well," she said, "I want to get from you a letter which you must have got to-day. I want to get it from you unread, if you will give it to me; but read or not, I want it back again."

Montana now looked a little surprised. "Certainly," he said, "you shall have any letter that I have received which concerns you in the least. But I have read scores of letters this morning already, and I don't remember one of them in which you could have the slightest interest. However, I give you my promise that you shall have any of them, or all of them, if you are in the least inclined."

"Perhaps you have not read this one yet?"

she said. "You have letters still remaining, perhaps, unopened?"

"A good many," he said with a melancholy smile. "The opening and reading of letters is one of the weariest occupations of my life. I sometimes feel inclined to wish there were no post-office. See, there is a heap of letters already on this table by the last post, which my secretary has not touched as yet, nor I. Will you look amongst them? Do you know the handwriting of the letter you speak of?"

"I do, very well."

"Is the writer a man or a woman?"

"It is a girl," Geraldine said, with some hesitation.

One little gleam of curiosity and surprise did actually come into Montana's eyes. "Will you tell me," he said, "why you want the letter back?"

"Oh, no," she said, "and that is another favour; pray don't ask that. Think I am unreasonable; think I am ridiculous; think I am out of my senses, if you like, but grant me this favour. Do let me have the letter, and don't ask me anything about it."

"By all means," Montana answered. "Look amongst these letters, and take away any one you like."

Geraldine tried to be cool and composed. She turned the pile of letters over and over, and

sought out the one she fain would have. It was not there. No address was written in any handwriting in the least like that of Melissa Aquitaine.

"It has not come yet," she said, "but it will come. I don't know what to do."

"What is this terrible letter?" Montana asked. "You see, if you give me any description by which I may know it, I can look for it, and will take care that it is sent to you. Or would you rather come here after the next post or two and try again?"

"Oh, no," she said. "I can't come again."

"Can't you give me any idea of what sort of letter it is, or what it is about? Surely you may trust me so far as that?"

"I must," said Geraldine, rather dolefully. "I must trust you. I can't come again to-day, and the letter will certainly reach you some time to-day. It is a letter in the handwriting of a girl who has written you ever so many letters before—letters of admiration, and homage, and that sort of thing. You may perhaps know the handwriting; I beg you, if you do, to send me back that letter unopened."

"I don't remember any one handwriting in particular! I receive a great many letters from women, and let me say, Miss Rowan, not a few of them are foolish letters. Do I know the writer of this letter?"

"Pray don't ask me anything," said Geraldine.

"The writer of the letter now wishes she had not written this last one, and I want to get it back."

Montana stopped for a moment, and a sudden expression came over his face which made him look as if he had grown ten years younger. "Can it be possible," he said, "that you have yourself written these letters, Geraldine, and that you now repent, and want this one back? If this is so, pray, pray let me recall my promise."

"I have not written the letters," said Geraldine, with a scornful ring in her voice; "I never wrote such letters, and I should never be likely to write any such — to you, of all men in the world. The foolish child who did write them has at last been wild enough to tell you her name, and if you will give me back the letter — well — I shall thank you, and say that you are perhaps better than I thought." She got out the words slowly, one by one, with difficulty and hesitation. "But if you won't give it back to me, then I can't help it — keep it — I have no more to say."

"You are angry with me," Montana said gently, "and I don't wonder. I was wrong to think that you could have written such letters. I know you would not; much as I want you to think well of me, I don't want you to express a kindly feeling in such a way as that. You shall have the letter, of course. I don't want to read the poor girl's nonsense. I don't want to know her name, or who she is. I should give her good

advice, if I knew her, and try to reason her out of her folly. What do I care about the admiration and the rapture of women? I would rather have one kindly word from you than the homage of all the other women in the world."

CHAPTER XVIII.

ILL MET BY MOONLIGHT.

WHAT Geraldine might have said in answer to this declaration she did not herself know, for at that moment the conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Lady Vanessa Barnes and her husband. The tall handsome lady seemed to fill the pretty little reception-room as she came in with her strong, graceful movement, every motion as she walked seeming to tell of careless, unconscious strength, and her face lighted with animation, high spirits, and curiosity.

Mr. Barnes, her husband, was a young-looking, slender, somewhat timid man, who always seemed as if he were trying to escape from notice behind his wife's petticoats. He was a man of intelligence and ability in his own way, a keen financier, a reader, and almost a scholar; but his business in life now was to be overshadowed by his wife, and it was his pleasure too. To rest in her shade

made him happy. She was very fond of him, and he knew it, and liked her to have her own way in everything.

Lady Vanessa fixed her eyes inquiringly on Geraldine, and after the interchange of a few words with Montana, she turned to the girl and said,

"I always remember any face I see, and I have seen this young lady somewhere—at the Church of Free Souls, or whatever you call it. Am I right, Mr. Montana?"

Montana presented Geraldine. He was glad Lady Vanessa had come. Her coming prevented Geraldine from replying to his declaration. It compelled her to receive it without a protest. That was something.

"Yes, I thought as much," said Lady Vanessa. "You are the young American girl, ain't you?—some one told me you were."

"No," said Geraldine, "I am not an American. I have lived in America, but I am an Irish girl." She usually had to explain about three times a day that, although she had lived for many years in America, she was nevertheless not an American.

"Oh, an Irish girl?" Lady Vanessa said. "I see—yes, exactly; that is why you are so good-looking. They say all Irish girls are good-looking, don't they?"

"I don't know," said Geraldine.

"But you know that you are good-looking," said the pertinacious lady.

"I don't," said Geraldine.

"Come, now, is that true?"

"Quite true," replied Geraldine boldly. "There are different ideas about good looks; I don't admire myself."

"Oh, you don't? Mr. Montana does, I dare say."

"Every one does," said Montana. "All who know Miss Rowan admire her."

"Well, I am sure I admire you already," Lady Vanessa said. "But, where did you get that pensive look in your eyes? You look as if you were dreaming."

"I am short-sighted, and I suppose that gives one a dreamy look."

"Then, I wish I were short-sighted," said Lady Vanessa. "That is exactly the sort of look I should like to have. Don't you think so, Albert? Do look at Miss Rowan's eyes, dear. Isn't there a wonderful expression in them?"

Mr. Barnes looked, not very boldly, into Miss Rowan's eyes, and said, Yes, there was. Quite so. Exactly.

Geraldine felt embarrassed—an unusual thing for her. She was not embarrassed in the least by Lady Vanessa's questions or compliments, but by the whole situation, by Montana's recent words, by the knowledge that the moments were passing

rapidly away—so rapidly, that she must get back soon—and that she had not got the letter.

She must go. Other visitors would come, and it was impossible that Montana could now satisfy her request. She rose to go. She cast an appealing look at him. Despite his recent declaration, she had to appeal to him still, for Melissa's sake. She hoped he would understand her look, and come with her out of the room, and let her exchange another word with him. He did understand her, for he rose to accompany her to the stairs. But as she was going, Lady Vanessa stopped her with a friendly hand.

"Look here, my dear young woman," she said, drawing Geraldine aside; "I must give you a piece of advice; you are from America, and girls do as they like there. You don't understand our ways. You must not come all alone here paying visits to handsome men like Mr. Montana. That will never do. People will talk about you. Don't be offended. I give you the advice for your good."

"I am much obliged to you," said Geraldine coldly. "I think I can take care of myself."

"Awfully proud," said Lady Vanessa. "I see; all right, dear; I mean no offence."

"Indeed, I have not taken offence," said Geraldine, recovering herself, and pleased with the frank ways of the eccentric lady.

"You see, I am older than you," said Vanessa.

"I don't think you are, really," Geraldine answered, "if it comes to that."

"Well, I'm older in experience; I'm married; I am well up in all the ways of our world here, and I know what people would say. I never care what they say of me, to be sure; but that's a different thing."

"Why is it so different?" Geraldine was too ingenuous even to suspect that Lady Vanessa meant to say, "Because I am a great lady and you are not."

"Oh, well," and Vanessa laughed; "because, don't you see? I have caught my fish, child, and you haven't—at least, you haven't hooked him yet. That's how it is." She gave her husband's arm a good-humoured squeeze. "This is my fish, don't you see? I've hooked him."

Then Lady Vanessa and Geraldine both became aware that a new visitor was entering the room—a visitor of a very different class from any to which the Duchess of Magdiel's daughter was accustomed.

We have already spoken of the wrecks coming to the shore, Montana being the shore to which they drifted. Amongst the wrecks which thus came floating towards him was that of a family of a fanatical poor working man, a member of a small odd sect of Peculiar People, or such-like,

who in an early chapter of this book has been described as attending Montana's first lecture in London, and going up to him and making his acquaintance—what time the Duke of Magdiel was coldly repulsed. Poor Matthew Starr was a fanatic of benevolence, a furious devotee of equality and of purity, a virtue's Quixote in the east end of London, and in a ragged moleskin jacket. A waif and wreck of the ancient Chartist days, he had spent his life working hard, rising early, resting late, suffering want, weariness, disappointment after disappointment, seeing the light of every hope go out one after the other, and still living and feeding on his faith in an impossible future of happiness and equality and goodness for the living world. He might in other days have been a martyr—perhaps a Stylites. Fate had sentenced him to drudge in Whitechapel, to marry a stupid little girl who in the end took to drink and died of drink, to have a crowd of children depending on him, and whom he had to trust to the nursing of chance, or strangers, or each other, or anybody, during his long daily work. They grew up, and most of them turned out as he would not have them. Two of the boys went into the army, and he hated soldiering with a passionate intensity of hatred. War was to him only murder on a large scale. A soldier he regarded simply as Cain in a red coat. Another son became a servant, a footman; and if there was anything which Matthew Starr

hated almost as much as a soldier, it was a lacquey. Two of his daughters had become domestic servants. For one of them he had succeeded in getting a place in a milliner's shop, and she presently went terribly astray and wandered the streets at nights, and poor Matthew Starr was as much of a fanatic for purity in women as he was for peace and good-will in men. Still, he remained hoping on, believing in the good time coming, passionately longing for some new world and new life under other influences and other skies. When Montana came to London and divulged his scheme, it seemed to Starr as if heaven were opening to him—at least, as if heaven had sent to him this man with a special commission to lead him out of the darkness and despair of his London life into light and happiness.

Montana smiled on him with that sweetness which passed with so many of his admirers for an almost divine beneficence. But, to do him justice, he did not merely smile; he was really kind to poor Starr. The one thing that the old man would most wish to have done for him, Montana did. He found out the lost daughter, and talked to her gravely and sweetly, brought her back to her father's house, and undertook to find for her some fitting occupation until they could go out to the happy new world where all was to be well. Not without trouble did Montana get Starr to receive his daughter back again. All

his authority was needed to enforce it, though when it was done the man seemed to soften to the girl, even more than might have been expected, and to cling to her with new passion of love and hope. As for her, she soon wearied of the narrow miserable home where she hated to live. She hated a life of monotony. She was only kept from tearing herself away and going back to her old ways by her belief in the happiness that was in store for them when they should become members of Montana's new colony. Montana had often pictured for them the life that was to be in that new place, where all were to be equals, and all were to have work enough, and only enough, and ample leisure, and means to live, and amusement, and no care; no mists and fogs and cold skies over them, no mud under their feet, no dark dull houses around them, no tenements crowded with hard-working, hard-drinking lodgers and screaming children. The man and the girl lived on the hope of this new life, he because it was to be a life of equality, and purity, and progress, and she because it was to relieve her from the monotony of her present existence, and because it offered her some prospect of variety, and colour, and amusement, and perhaps—for she never followed very closely Montana's somewhat vague descriptions—some promise of money, fine clothes, and frequent visits to a theatre.

Mr. Starr was for modestly drawing back when he saw the ladies, but Montana called to him to come in, and he entered with a look half timid, half defiant, at once shy and fierce—awkward in the presence of the well-dressed women, angry with himself at the bare idea that they should think he was awkward, and determined to make it plain that he was not. He looked with a glance of especial defiance at the tall and imposing Lady Vanessa; and as she returned his look with an expression of amused curiosity, he set her down at once as an enemy. He turned a sharp glance upon Geraldine; but as her eyes only looked softly into his with the dreamy expression of short sight, he assumed that she felt rather kindly towards humanity in general, and was inclined to like her.

"I am glad to see you, Starr," said Montana, shaking hands with the old man cordially, and favouring him with a specially sweet smile. "How is Fanny? does she get to like her work any better?"

"Fanny don't like her work," and Mr. Starr shook his head; "she don't get reconciled to it, somehow; she don't like the being up early and down late. She don't like the regular hours. She's not been used to it, poor thing, so long as I have. The unicorn, Mr. Montana, don't like to abide by the crib, does he?"

There was a certain half-educated dignity

about Mr. Starr's style of speech and about his fanatical free-thinking. He read the Bible a good deal, and admired its language and its illustrations. He read Shakespeare and Milton, and Paine's "Rights of Man," and the "Vestiges of Creation," and the essays and speeches of Mr. W. J. Fox.

"No," said Montana, "she is young. We must make allowance for her, Starr, must we not?"

"We must, Mr. Montana, and we do. I am sure you do. We must get her away out of this. When we have her out in your grand new settlement under the bright skies, and where there is a life to live for, I think she will settle down then and be a fine woman yet; I do. But I long for it. When is it to be, Mr. Montana? Do tell me!"

"Soon," said Montana, "but not too soon. We cannot hurry the movement of events."

This was oracular, and it was all that Starr could get to satisfy him. He sighed. Then, suddenly looking up, he asked, "There ain't no delay, Mr. Montana? no putting off? nothing you did not expect?"

"All," said Montana, "is going on exactly as I expected and arranged."

"Thank God! said Starr. "But I am disturbing these ladies," he added, for he saw that Lady Vanessa seemed about to go. "I am intruding, maybe? I will go."

"Pray don't go for me," said Lady Vanessa; "I am going myself."

"This is a friend of mine, Lady Vanessa," said Montana; "Mr. Starr, an honest, capable working man, a credit to his order, a man who has educated himself, and has had a hard struggle with life and fate."

"I am glad to know you," said Lady Vanessa good-humouredly; and her husband expressed equal pleasure in knowing Mr. Starr, but he thought to himself that surely Montana was an odd sort of person.

"I don't think you are glad to know me," said Starr, addressing Lady Vanessa, and ignoring Mr. Barnes altogether. "You are a fine lady—a great lady, I dare say. What should you be glad to know me for? You are the enemy of my class. You would be my enemy if I was worth it, but I am not."

"Starr, my dear friend!" Montana said, interposing.

"Look here, you know——" said Mr. Barnes.

"All right, Albert; never mind," said Lady Vanessa. "I don't mind in the least. I like our friend to have his say out. Why shouldn't he? Well, Mr. Starr, why do you call me the enemy of your class? I don't want to be anybody's enemy, I am sure; and I don't think I am—except my own, perhaps, sometimes."

"You and your class are our enemies," said Starr. "You keep us down, and grind us, and crush us, and keep us from our rights. You have the land and the money, and you live in fine houses, and you wear grand clothes," and he waved his hand towards Lady Vanessa as if he were specially pointing attention to her garments, and calling the world to witness that his words were true; "and we starve, we work morning and night, and our girls suffer—they go wrong, maybe."

"I like arguing," said Lady Vanessa. "One does not often find anybody to argue so stoutly as our friend. But now, look here, my good man; I couldn't help being born what I was any more than you. What good would it do to you if I didn't wear good clothes? You wouldn't take money, I suppose, if I offered it to you?"

"No," he said; "no man ever dared to offer me charity, and I hope a woman wouldn't do it."

"Then, what could we do for you?" she asked bluntly.

"Anyhow, you have all the money and all the good things, and you keep them; and we have no share, and we have as good a right to them as you; and we work, and you do nothing. I don't mind the Queen—I don't find fault with the Queen."

"Well, that's considerate," said Lady Vanessa, with a laugh.

"No, I don't; she has some work to do, anyhow. She has business set out for her; she has duties, and she does them. I don't say that I think the country wants such duties; but they are given to her, and she does them, and she has a right to her pay; and I am told she is a good woman, and minds her children—or did mind them when they were young. I find fault with you—you and your lot. You have no duties. If you had, you wouldn't do them. You have nothing to do but take your money and spend it."

"You ought to like this young lady," said Lady Vanessa. "She is a Republican; she comes from America."

"Do you come from America, ma'am?" said the old Chartist, turning to Geraldine, his eyes suddenly lighting.

"I have lived a long time in America," she said. "I don't know whether I am a Republican or not. I am Republican for America, certainly; but I have not thought over the matter very much for any other place, Mr. Starr. Are you a Republican?"

"Oh, yes!" he said. "I live for Republican principles. I'd like to die for them. I live in the hope of being one day in a Republic—in Mr Montana's new Republic, with him for president, and us all equal. I shouldn't care to live another hour if it were not for that and for Fanny—that's my daughter, miss."

"Is she ill?" asked Geraldine; because she fancied, from his manner of answering Montana, that she must be.

"She is ill, ma'am; not in the bodily sense so much—although she is delicate a good deal—she is restless; she is unhappy."

"May I go and see her?" Geraldine asked, in her usual impulsive way.

Mr. Starr looked uneasily at Montana. "Well, I'm sure I don't know, miss," he said. "Maybe it would not be right of me to bring you to see her."

"Oh, if it's anything like fever or that, I don't care a straw—I mean, I'm not afraid. I have done all sorts of nursing; I never got any harm."

"No, miss; no, it is not that; she is not sick in that way. But I don't think Mr. Montana would like you to know her, perhaps."

"But," said Lady Vanessa, "this young lady is a Republican and a Democrat, don't you know. She hasn't any of my odious class prejudices; she is not your daughter's enemy. I suppose it would be no use for me to ask to go to see her. But I would if you would let me."

Mr. Starr looked into the great lady's eyes, and really saw only a kind of blunt good-nature there.

"Well," he said, "I don't believe you're half as bad as you seem. I dare say you would do

a good turn for anyone; and it isn't your fault, as you say, that you were born a curse to the world—I mean your class, ma'am, not yourself. I dare say you are a kind-hearted, honest sort of woman. But it was not about that I was thinking when I did not want this young lady to come to see us. You are not married, ma'am—miss, I mean?"

"No," said Geraldine. "What would that matter?"

"Are you married, my lady?" he got out the title with great difficulty, and as an absolute concession to Lady Vanessa's personal good-nature.

Yes, Vanessa assured him that she was married.

"Well, I don't know," he said; "you are both of you very kind; but I can't say. I'll ask Mr. Montana about it."

"And Mr. Montana will let me know," said Lady Vanessa; "and if there is anything at all I can do to show that I am not the enemy of your class, Mr. Starr, I'll do it."

Lady Vanessa and her husband went away. Some other people came in.

"I will go to see your daughter, Mr. Starr," said Geraldine, "if you will give me your address. I shan't wait to ask Mr. Montana. Republican girls from America, you know, don't ask anyone's authority to do anything."

It was not possible for Geraldine to wait any longer. She was palpitating with anxiety at having

to wait so long; and she had still to speak again with Montana about Melissa's hapless letter. When she left the room, Montana went with her. In her anxiety about Melissa, she had almost forgotten the very direct avowal of admiration and something more which he had so lately made to her.

But Montana was calculating upon all her movements. He knew what an advantage he must have in the fact that she had, as it were, to condone his declaration of love, and to talk with him in the closest confidence after he had made it and she had heard it. Even if he had now in his hand the letter which she was so anxious to get, he would not give it to her just yet. It had still a purpose to serve.

When they got outside the door, she asked, "What *am* I to do, Mr. Montana? You cannot give me this letter——"

"I have not got it," he said. "Can you wait? You might wait in one of the other rooms. Nobody will come there; and as the letters come, they shall be shown to you. You can wait in the room where the letters are always brought."

"I can't wait," she said. "It is impossible. I must go back."

"Shall I come and see you to-night, and bring the letters with me? I am going to dine out. I will call afterwards and ask for you."

She thought over this for a moment. "That would never do," she said. "I should not be able

to see you without making people wonder and suspect something."

"Then, will you come and see me here late to-night? It does not matter. We understand each other. Nobody will know."

"Oh, I couldn't do that," said Geraldine. "That is beyond even me, Mr. Montana."

"Can I send you the letter?" he asked. Then he stopped suddenly and said, "Of course I can't do that; I don't know the handwriting. Besides, if it really is so serious a thing as you think, we had better not let anybody into it. Will you send your maid here at ten o'clock to-night? The last post will have come in, and the letter must be here then if it is to come at all."

"I haven't a maid," said Geraldine. "And even if I had I should not like to let her into all this. I don't want to bring other eyes on me. I couldn't send Miss Marion's maid or—anybody's."

She was going to say "Miss Aquitaine's," but stopped so significantly that Montana, if he had been the dullest person in the world, could not have failed to know why she forbore to utter that name. He had not guessed before who his mysterious correspondent was. It was clear as light to him now.

"I can only think of one other plan, Miss Rowan. Don't be alarmed. It may look very dreadful, but it is not. I shall leave the place where I am dining, early, and get back here, and

get whatever letters there are in anything at all like a woman's handwriting. I shall walk into Berkeley Square. Will you find some way to come there at ten o'clock, and you shall see the letters and take the one you want? Come, I can think of nothing else but this. It is not a bad plan, and, after all, mysterious meetings are best carried on in the public street. Don't be afraid. If you really are anxious about the letter, this is the only thing to do."

Geraldine turned it over in her mind as quickly as she could. She thought it did seem the best thing to do. To call again the next day, or to get him to send her letter after letter on the chance of its being the right one, or to wait any longer for any cause, seemed most unwise. In the depths of her heart, she did not trust Montana far enough to leave the letter too long in his possession. "I have to get it," she thought to herself. "I have set my heart upon it, and I will not stick at a trifle to succeed."

"Yes, Mr. Montana," she said at once, and quite composedly, "I will see you in Berkeley Square at ten to-night. Good-bye, until then."

She was not five minutes from Captain Marion's house, and we may be sure she lost no time on the way. She exchanged a hasty word with Melissa.

"It will be all right, Melissa. I haven't got it yet——"

"Oh, you haven't got it?" Melissa said discontentedly. "I thought as much!"

"But I shall get it, you sceptical little girl; you shall have it to-night."

It was only when she got to her own room, and was hastily dressing for dinner, that Geraldine began to reflect on the wild escapade she was engaging in, and on the fact that Montana had made to her something very like a declaration of love, and that she had not repelled it.

Mr. Longfellow, in his charming "Hyperion," compares something or some line of argument to certain roads in the wilder parts of America which begin broad and clear, and gradually get narrower and narrower, becoming a mere footpath through a forest, and at last dwindling away into a squirrel track and running up a tree. Curzon Street, Mayfair, is not a little like a road of that description. Opening broadly enough out of Seasmore Place, it goes a stately way about as far as Queen Street, and then it gets smaller, dwindling down after it passes Clarges Street, and wandering through little shops and stables, until at last, when it has crossed Bolton Street, behold, it suddenly becomes Lansdowne Passage, a narrow paved walk between two high walls, which may perhaps for the purpose of our comparison be accepted as the equivalent of the squirrel track. Lansdowne Passage has the early Georges in every brick and paving-stone. It is only a few feet in width. It

is paved like the floor of a dungeon, and the walls that gird it in are of appalling height. There is a little gate at each end, a sort of little turnstile which does not turn, and there is a little flight of steps at the end that opens upon Berkeley Street just where Berkeley Street touches Berkeley Square; and as one passes through, he might fancy he hears the rustle of the dresses of the prim ladies in the early Georgian time, and sees the stiff stocks and pigtails belonging to the military heroes of that period. Lansdowne Passage tells of the Georges as Kensington in some of its old quarters tells of Queen Anne, or the Tower reminds us of Mary and Elizabeth and Jane Grey.

Geraldine Rowan, although, as we have said more than once before, delighting in all the associations of early London, and loving to find everywhere some memory of a great name, or a past day, or a pretty story, was not concerning herself much about Georgian times or any reminiscences that might properly belong to the little pavement she trod when she entered Lansdowne Passage at ten o'clock that quiet beautiful summer night. She was only thinking of the venturesome expedition she had come on, and the strange risk she ran. This was a very different thing from calling on Mr. Montana in the bright bustling hours before dinner. This expedition was under cover of night, although a night well moonlighted, and there was mystery about it. It had

the air of an assignation. It could hardly be justified in the eyes of any sober and prudent elders whatever. Hardly, she thought, would her own mother have easily pardoned her for doing such a thing as this. And yet, what else could she do? She had thought the matter over again and again, and there seemed no way out of it but to make this venture. There was no other hope of extricating poor Melissa from a difficulty that indeed might come to be a great danger in the end. Geraldine felt that she was really running a risk, possibly making a sacrifice, to help her friend, and that thought made her only feel proud and resolute. She would not turn back now. She would see the thing out, come of it what might.

Mr. Montana was punctual. Geraldine had hardly emerged from Lansdowne Passage into Berkeley Street when she saw that he was waiting at the corner of Berkeley Square. He came towards her at once. Just at that moment it so happened that Lady Vanessa Barnes was returning in her brougham from a dinner-party, and on her way to spend the evening in one of the streets near Berkeley Square. Montana had sat next her at dinner that day, and she had particularly asked him to come and talk to her in the drawing-room afterwards. He had excused himself, saying he had to leave early, and had not appeared in the drawing-room at all. Lady Vanessa was vexed, found the affair dull, and left early. Now she saw

Montana standing at the corner of Berkeley Square as if waiting for some one. She made her coachman drive slowly; she was a young woman endowed with much curiosity, and not always particularly scrupulous about the gratification of it. In a moment she saw a woman come out through the gate of Lansdowne Passage, and saw Montana hasten to meet her. They began to walk slowly round the square, on the path by the gardens, where a great plaster nymph or naiad, or some such personage, is doing something with an urn. Lady Vanessa drove round the square two or three times, and still saw them walking slowly, apparently in deep and confidential conversation. Once the girl looked round, and might have seen Lady Vanessa, but that Lady Vanessa drew back. Lady Vanessa saw her plainly. She was astonished, shocked, highly amused.

"So this is my little American girl," she thought as she drove away, "who is so highly independent of the world's ways, and knows so well how take care of herself; and this is my saintly Montana! I shall open that girl's eyes a little, and let her see what a silly thing she is doing. I think my saint might have more sense, at his time of life, than to make midnight assignations with a girl in a square in London."

It was not exactly midnight, but midnight would do well enough for Lady Vanessa.

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